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December 2025

Book and audiobook recommendations for all ages

Holiday Romance Roundup

Interview with Nadia Latif and Walter Mosley

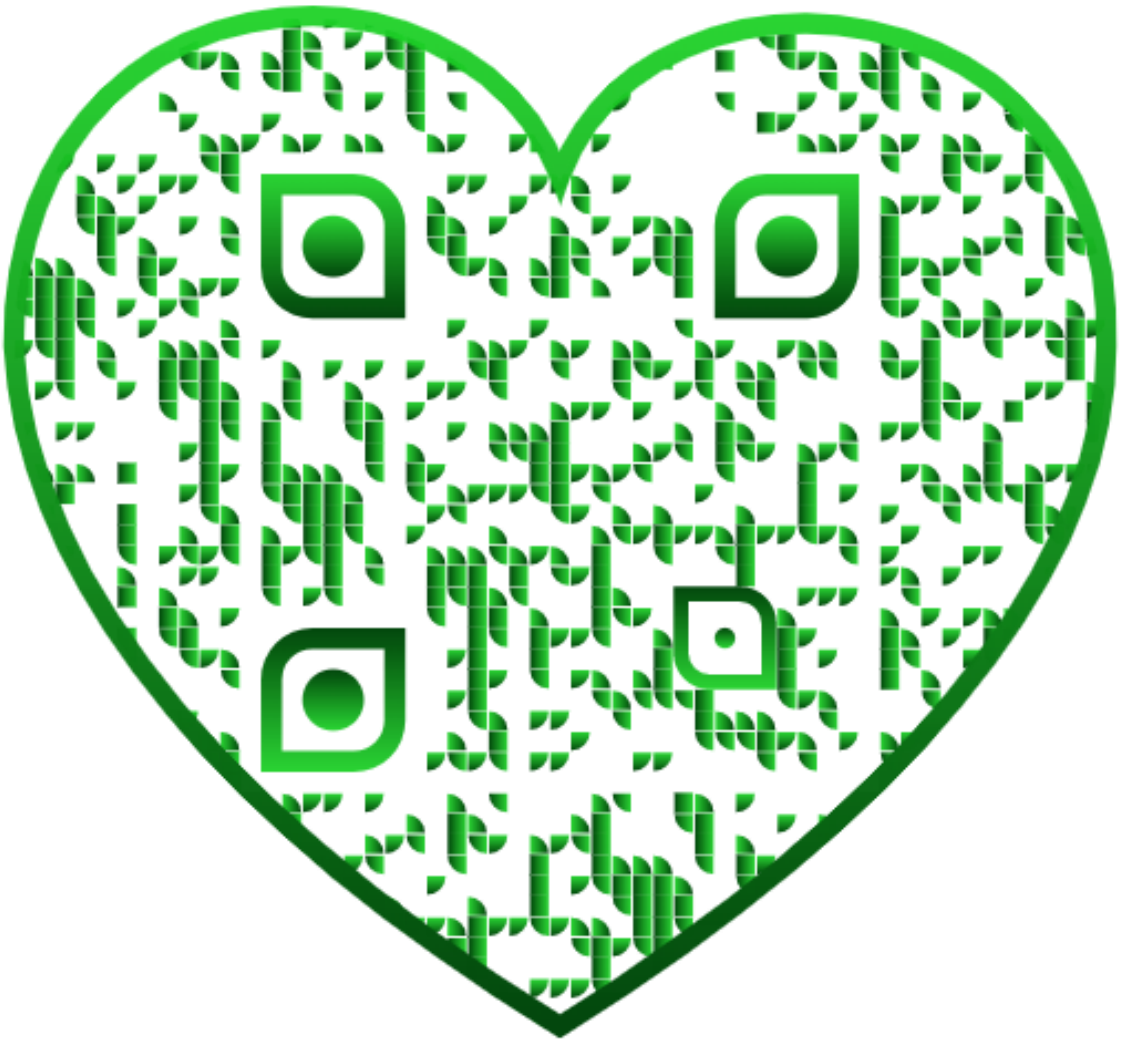
Must-Listen: Sci-Tech Audio for All

Historical Fiction Beyond World Wars

Art by Evening Monteiro, from *Through the Telescope: Mae Jemison Dreams of Space*, by Charles R. Smith Jr.

PBS BOOKS

LIBRARY READS



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- Top 10 book lists for all your favorite genres
- Author Interviews
- Read-alike lists
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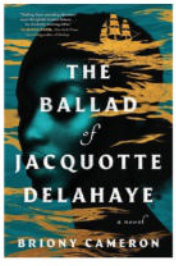
ReadAlert

Featuring reviews of popular books for all ages--including audiobooks!

Booklist Reader

December 2025
Volume 5, Issue 4

Adult Books



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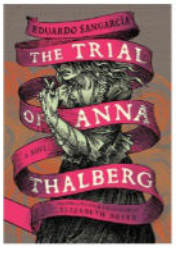

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On the Cover

From *Through the Telescope: Mae Jemison Dreams of Space*, by Charles R. Smith Jr., illustrated by Evening Monteiro, and published by Scholastic. *Through the Telescope* appears in "Recent Picture Book Biographies of Scientists" in this issue.

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From the Publisher

World Population Review recently released data on countries that read the most. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that, according to this survey, Americans are at the top of the list, reading on average seven hours per week, or 357 hours per year. The survey estimates that this equals 17 books read per year. India is just behind America, with 352 reading hours per year (or 16 books per year). This is encouraging news. It reveals that amid the tech boom, the rise of AI, and the popularity of various and sundry social channels, we still love to read books and we read more than people in other parts of the world. I celebrate this and I'm thrilled that we at *Booklist* help readers and library workers discover and read outstanding books in many genres. With the holidays around the corner, be sure to consider books as gifts or simply recommend a few of the great reads you'll find in this issue to your friends and family. After all, the recommendations offered here are available in the library. We'll see you in 2026 and we wish you all the best for the New Year!

—George Kendall
gkendall@ala.org

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Booklist is a book-review magazine that has been published by the American Library Association for more than 100 years and is widely viewed as offering the most reliable reviews to help libraries decide what to buy and to help library patrons and students decide what to read, view, or listen to.

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Top 10

Historical Fiction Debuts

These debut historical novels cover lots of the twentieth century, but also delve into deeper historical time lines.

Art from *Frederick Douglass*.

The Ballad of Jacquotte Delahaye. By Briony Cameron. 2024. Atria.

In this wonderfully gripping adventure, a queer woman of color in the seventeenth century dreams of leaving her stifling life in Santo Domingo and becomes a notorious pirate captain.

The English Problem. By Beena Kamlani. 2025. Crown.

In 1931, a young Indian man arrives in London, which he finds both charming and repellent, to become a barrister and follow the path personally laid out for him by Mahatma Gandhi to help overthrow British colonial rule in India.

Frederick Douglass. By Sidney Morrison. 2024. Hawthorne.

This wrenching and insightful novel refocuses Douglass' story on the personal and emotional, examining his relationships with his enslavers, mentors, and lovers, from those who tortured his family to those who tokenized him later in life.

A Kid from Marlboro Road. By Edward Burns. 2024. Seven Stories.

In this tender 1970s tale, a preternaturally observant, caring, and candid boy recounts the watershed summer leading up to his thirteenth birthday, from the large Irish families crammed into small Long Island houses to worries about his mother.

Malas. By Marcela Fuentes. 2024. Viking.

Alternating time lines and badass women mark this tale about a Texas border town in the 1950s and 1990s, introducing a new wife with a curse and a high-school sophomore facing an unwanted quinceañera.

Masquerade. By O. O. Sangoyomi. 2024. Forge.

This loose retelling of the myth of Persephone set in fifteenth-century West Africa paints a vibrant picture of a female witch blacksmith and a warrior king who sweeps her into political machinations, betrayal, and possibly even love.

The Stone Witch of Florence. By Anna Rasche. 2024. Park Row.

As a plague ravages Italy in 1348, a healer is summoned back to Florence, from whence she was exiled for heresy, to recover stolen church relics in a novel that combines elements of mystery and fantasy with a relatable, engaging history.

Teddy. By Emily Dunlay. 2024. Harper.

In a deliciously uneasy novel set in Rome in 1969, the Cold War is percolating and a diplomat's wife flounders, longing for what she imagined would be a glamorous life while her tightly controlled world is threatened by deceptions.

They Dream in Gold. By Mai Sennaar. 2024. Zando/SJP Lit.

Told from multiple perspectives and set in various time lines around the world, this dynamic debut follows a young couple who bond over being part of the African diaspora and their deep connection to music.

Tiananmen Square. By Lai Wen. 2024. Spiegel & Grau.

This pseudonymous novel presents, with candor and vulnerability, a picture of Beijing in 1989 as it convulses with student protests, following a young woman as she learns the subversive power of the arts until she stumbles into Tiananmen Square.

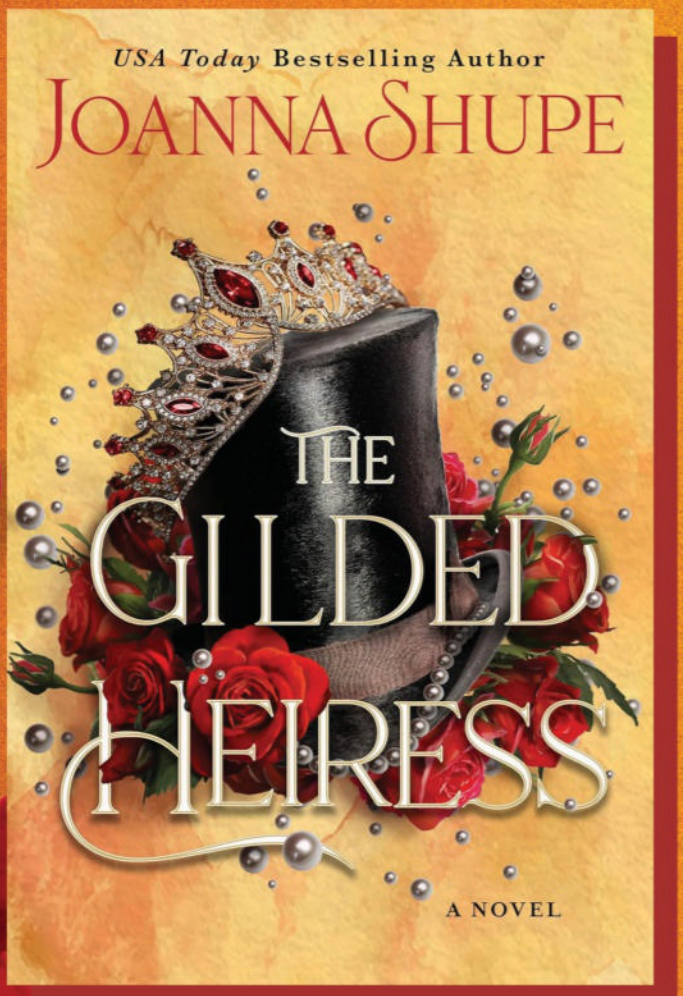
Art from *Tiananmen Square*.

10 Questions

Joanna Shupe

by John Charles

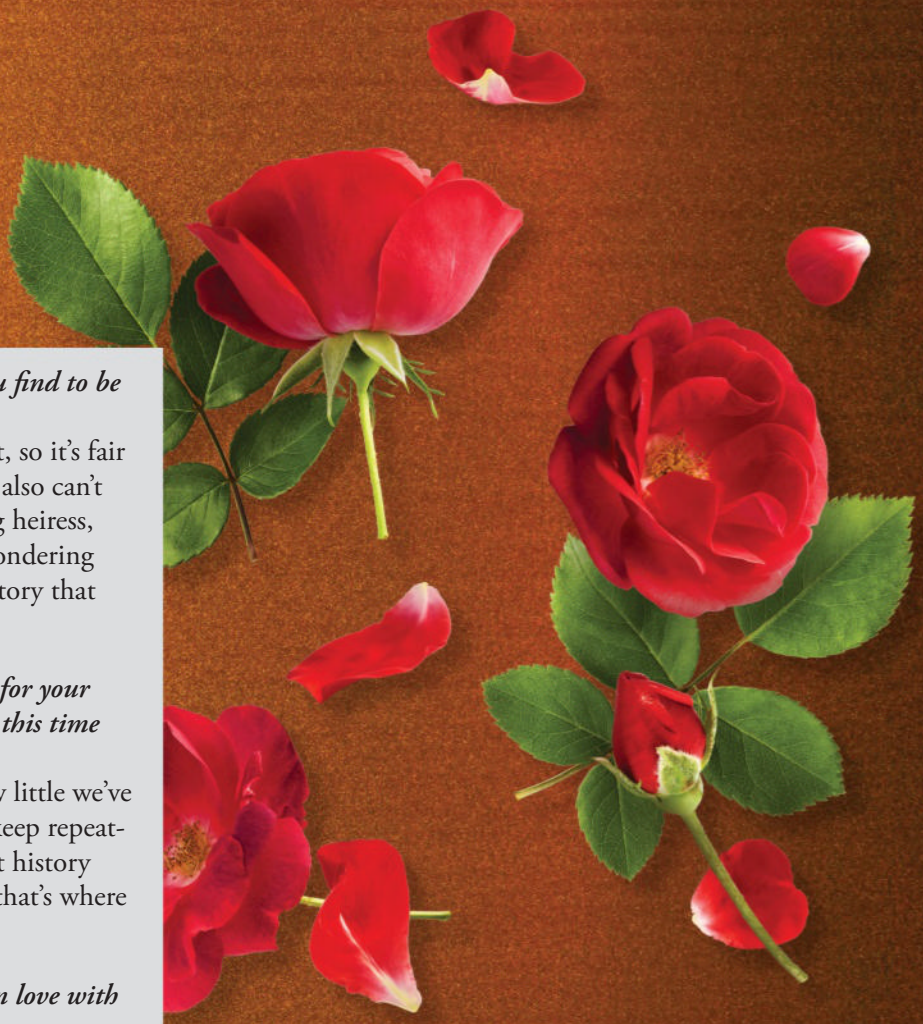
USA Today best-selling author Joanna Shupe has always loved history, ever since she saw her first Schoolhouse Rock cartoon. Her books have appeared on numerous yearly "best of" lists, including those in *Publishers Weekly*, *Washington Post*, *Kirkus*, *Kobo*, and *BookPage*. She lives in New Jersey with her two spirited daughters and opinionated husband.



1. Who is Joanna Shupe when she is at home?
She is probably at her laptop, ignoring everyone while furiously trying to finish a deadline! Seriously, I'm like most other busy working people with kids. I'm a chauffeur and cheerleader to my youngest daughter, who plays travel softball; I'm a counselor and friend to my older daughter, who is in college. I have an amazing husband who carries a lot of the weight of the day-to-day household, especially when I'm on deadline. I'm also a huge Ohio State football fan, and during hockey season, I'm Do Not Disturb whenever the Devils are playing.

2. What can you tell us about* The Gilded Heiress*?
The Gilded Heiress definitely has a lot of the things that my readers like—a bold, intelligent female main character, a slightly morally gray male main character, lots of spice—but it's also a bit different because we spend much of the book outside of high society. So there's two working-class characters just trying to better their lives.

3. What five words best describe* The Gilded Heiress*?
Steamy. Gripping. Fun. Redemption. Family.



4. What about the movie* Anastasia *did you find to be most inspiring as an author?
Let's be honest—Dimitri is undeniably hot, so it's fair to say he was part of the inspiration. But I also can't resist a good mystery. The idea of a missing heiress, kidnapped as a baby with the world left wondering what happened to her? That's the kind of story that pulls me in every time.

5. While researching America's Gilded Age for your romances, what have you discovered about this time period that has surprised you the most?
What's surprised me most lately is just how little we've learned from history—and how often we keep repeating the same mistakes. There's a saying that history doesn't repeat, but it rhymes. And I think that's where we are right now as a country.

6. What are the books that made you fall in love with romance fiction as a reader?
Like a lot of romance readers of a certain age (ahem), my roots lie in the "Js": Judith McNaught, Jude Deveraux, Julie Garwood, and, of course, Joanna Lindsay. I loved all the old-school bonkers plots. The crazier the better.

7. What role have libraries played in your life?
I grew up near a library and used to ride my bike there as a kid. I always participated in the summer reading challenges, trying to read more books than my sister, and I have fond memories of hanging out inside, picking out books to read. When I had my own kids, we visited libraries all the time for books and programs and a place to just relax. Now both of my daughters love to read!

8. What is the best piece of life advice you have been given?
It's okay to admit you don't know something. I'm quite often wrong. In fact, I want people to tell me when I'm wrong so that I can learn why. I never want to stop learning and growing as a person.

9. What is next for you as an author?
I'm working on the next book in this series for Avon, and it's a Gilded Age spin on Beauty and the Beast. Except Belle is married to Gaston, who is a terrible husband. The Beast is Gaston's enemy and may just have a crush on Belle.

I also write mafia romance under the pen name Mila Finelli, and I hope to get another book out before the year is up.

10. How can readers learn more about you and your books?
I'm on all social media as JoannaShupe, but am most active on Instagram. I do have a Facebook group, The Gilded Lilies, where we talk about all things romance, including shows like HBO's *The Gilded Age*. I also have a weekly newsletter that compares our present-day issues and politics to those of the Gilded Age and how they aren't so different. (See above regarding not learning from history!)

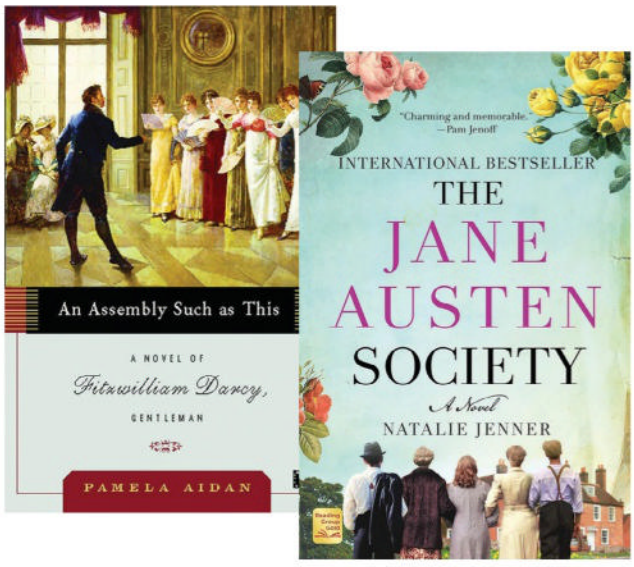
Art from *A Little Folly*.

Essentials

Jane Austen–Inspired Historical Fiction

by Stacey Hayman

Jane Austen admirers, long known as Janeites, revel in the evergreen power of her novels, which continue to inspire writers who create historical fiction in tribute to her indelible plotlines and characters. These contemporary variations reveal new relevance for Austen's keen psychological and social insights. As we mark the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth, readers are the ones receiving all the bookish gifts!



An Assembly Such as This: A Novel of Fitzwilliam Darcy, Gentleman. By Pamela Aidan. 2006. Touchstone.

Remaining true to the original source material, Aidan imagines *Pride and Prejudice* from Mr. Darcy's viewpoint, allowing for a deeper understanding of this legendary couple.

The Clergyman's Wife. By Molly Greeley. 2019. Morrow.

Greeley places Charlotte Lucas at center stage as she imagines Charlotte's life as the wife of Rev. William Collins in fresh and greater detail. Exploring Charlotte's thoughts and emotions will give *Pride and Prejudice* fans something new to ponder.

Godmersham Park. By Gill Hornby. 2022. Pegasus.

In 1804, Anne Sharp accepted the position as governess with the Austen family, beginning a deep and thoughtful friendship with Jane. As Hornby imagines Anne's relationships with her charge, Fanny, Jane's niece; and Henry Austen, Jane's brother, new details of the Austen family are brought to life and love is in the air.

The Heiress: The Revelations of Anne de Bourgh. By Molly Greeley. 2021. Morrow.

What circumstances caused Anne de Bourgh to grow into the woman readers meet in *Pride and Prejudice,* and what if she could choose a new path for herself after Mr. Darcy's refusal to propose?

The Jane Austen Society. By Natalie Jenner. 2020. St. Martin's.

In this novel that's set in 1945 Chawton, six longtime residents and two transplants form the Jane Austen Society, taking on the mission of preserving Austen's legacy before it's too late.

Jane Austen's First Love. By Syrie James. 2014. Berkley.

While visiting her brother in Kent, 15-year-old Jane Austen becomes enchanted with Edward Taylor, but quickly questions if he is actually as wonderful as her first impression implied.

The Last Bookshop in London. By Madeline Martin. 2021. Hanover Square.

Arriving in London as WWII is about to begin, Grace secures a job at the dingy Primrose Hill bookshop, where she finds a sense of peace while reading the classics, including the works of Jane Austen.

A Little Folly. By Jude Morgan. 2013. St. Martin's.

After their demanding father dies in 1813, Valentine and Louisa invite their lively London cousins to their estate in Devonshire, and new experiences ensue for all in this classic comedy of errors in the Austen style.

Longbourn. By Jo Baker. 2013. Knopf.

Adding a dash of *Downton Abbey* to *Pride and Prejudice*, Baker enables readers to experience the Bennet household through a housemaid's perspective.

Mary B. By Katherine J. Chen. 2019. Random.

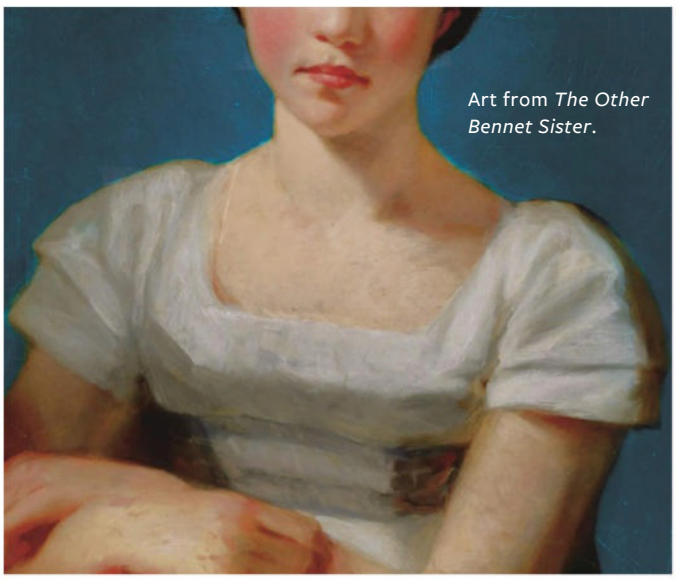
Mary Bennet might not be the flashiest sister, but that doesn't mean she lacks depths of emotion and interests of her own. The big question is: can she figure out how to live independently of her parents and without a husband?

Miss Austen: A Novel of the Austen Sisters. By Gill Hornby. 2020. Flatiron.

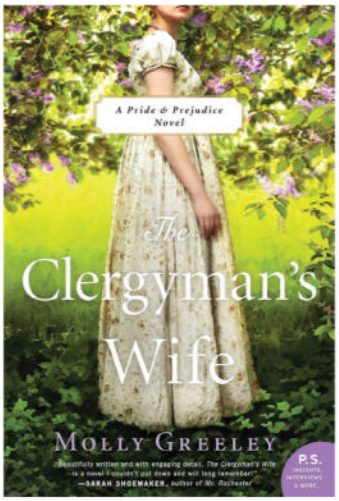
Cassandra Austen is looking for her beloved sister Jane's letters left hidden in a vicarage in Kintbury, letters that spark memories of the sisters' time together and reveal a new perspective on Cassandra's life.

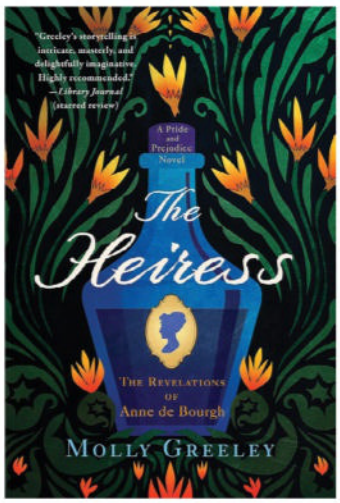
The Other Bennet Sister. By Janice Hadlow. 2020. Holt.

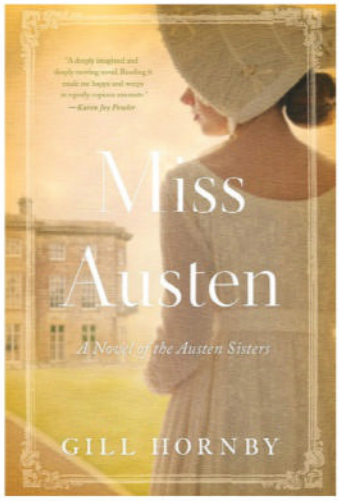
Plain, bookish Mary Bennet was overlooked amidst her vibrant siblings, but with time to reflect on her own character and choose her own path, Mary is realizing that she might find a satisfying life of her own. Hadlow's improvisation on *Pride and Prejudice* is being adapted for a ten-part BBC miniseries.

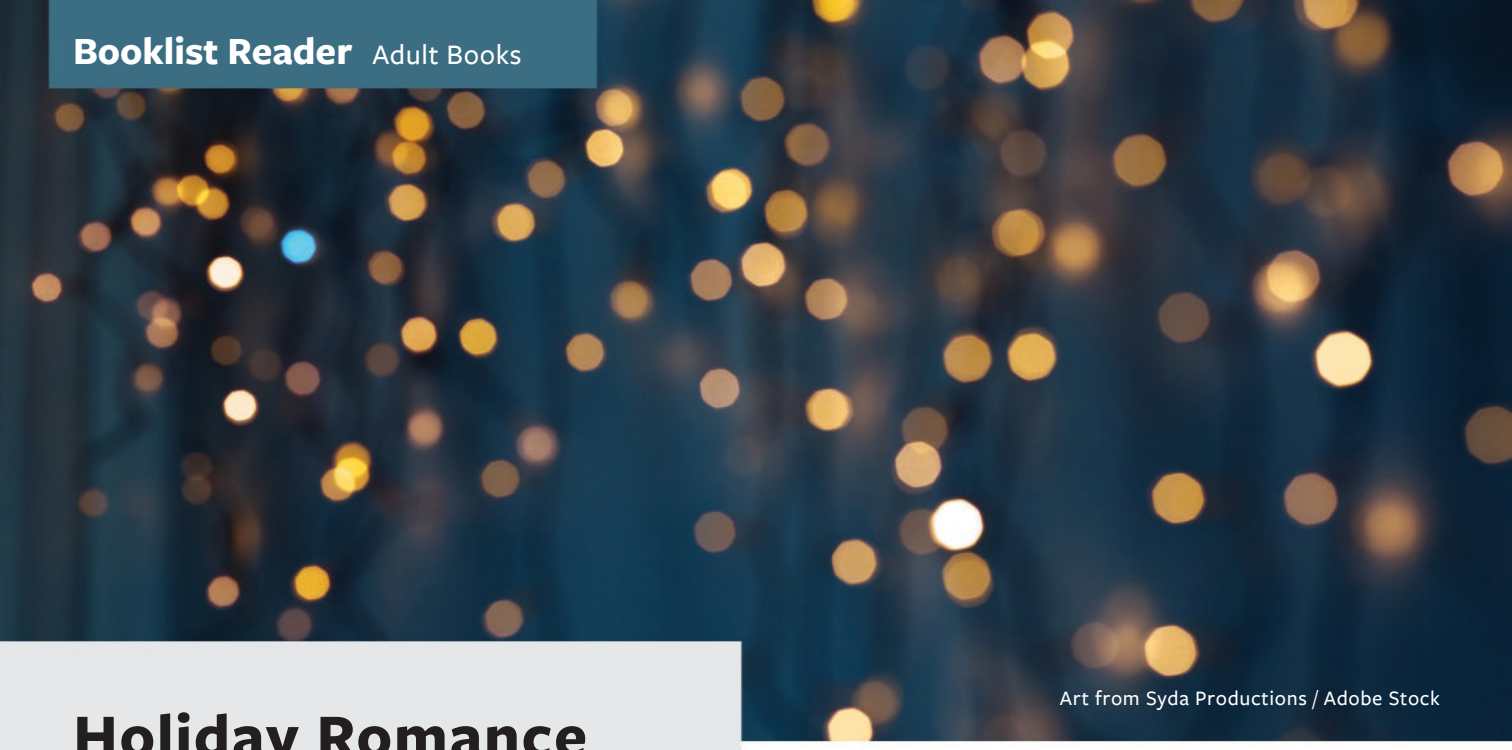


Art from *The Other Bennet Sister*.









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Holiday Romance Roundup

by John Charles

Romance writers are inspired by the winter holidays to create tales about overcoming obstacles to love whether dire or amusing. And what better time to cozy up with a book that promises a happy ending than in the season of gifts and good cheer?

Christmas at the Ranch. By Julia McKay. Sept. 2025. Putnam.

Hoping to escape the journalistic frenzy surrounding her father's recent embezzlement indictment, Emory Oakes flees Toronto and ends up in the small town of Evergreen. There, 10 years earlier, she enjoyed her first kiss with Tate Wilder, who is still there, running his family's horse ranch. In this heartwarming holiday romance, McKay delivers plenty of small-town charm and some adorable equine moments along with a message of love and forgiveness that is welcome all year round.

Christmas People. By Iva-Marie Palmer. Sept. 2025. St. Martin's/Griffin.

After spending the last three years trash-talking Christmas, one holiday season, aspiring screenwriter Jill Jacobs wakes up in Sweetville, a place brimming with so much goodwill and cheer it could be the default setting for a Heartfelt TV holiday rom-com. To escape this all-too cheerful parallel world, Jill has to write the rest of the love story underway in Sweetville right up to its happily-ever-after ending. Switching from writing for kids and teens, Palmer presents her first adult novel, a sublimely entertaining holiday romance with a cleverly calibrated mix of snappy wit, sexy chemistry, and sweet charm, all perfectly on point.

Date Night in December. By Jaqueline Snowe. Oct. 2025. Forever.

Convinced that her marriage is over, Laney Reynolds heads to her parent's home in Cherrywood for the holidays, only to discover her work-obsessed husband Connor has not only rented the house next-door but intends to prove to Laney their marriage deserves a second chance. Readers who like their holiday love stories naughty and nice will love unwrapping Snowe's latest expertly executed romance about a couple falling in love all over again.

Good Spirits. By B. K. Borison. Oct. 2025. Avon.

Given her relatively blemish-free past, Annapolis antique-shop owner Harriet York doesn't understand why Nolan Callahan, a Ghost of Christmas Past, is paying her a visit. However, the more time she spends with Nolan, the more Harriet begins to wonder if her past does need redeeming. Effectively employing a wealth of wit and whimsy, Borison works a bit of holiday magic in crafting this thoroughly satisfying romance that reads like a merry mash-up of *A Christmas Carol* and *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, imbued with enough sensual heat to keep readers warm and toasty all season long.

Holly and Nick Hate Christmas. By Betsy St. Amant. Sept. 2025. WaterBrook.

Holly Sinclair now has one more reason to hate Christmas. Her brother Ryan has asked his coworker Nick

Kinsley, who is a bit of a Grinch himself, to be her pity date on their trip home for the holidays. This prompts Holly to launch Operation Naughty List in which she will embrace everything Christmas-related in an effort to drive Nick crazy! In between all the humorous holiday antics, St. Amant thoughtfully explores the true meaning of Christmas in the form of family, friends, and faith.

A Mannequin for Christmas. By Timothy Janovsky. Sept. 2025. St. Martin's/Griffin.

Unlucky in love, Henry Aster thinks magic is nonsense until he makes a wish for a perfect man and discovers that one of the mannequins in his vintage shop has become actual flesh and blood. Of course, there is a catch. Unless the now alive Aiden Smith experiences true human love by midnight on New Year's Eve, he will turn back into a mannequin forever. Janovsky hits all the right holiday notes with wit and charm to spare in this ingeniously inventive, welcomingly inclusive holiday romance.

A Sea View Christmas. By Julie Klassen. Sept. 2025. Bethany House.

While trying to plan the best Christmas ever for her younger sister, Georgie, Sarah Summers receives a welcome gift of her own when Scottish widower Callum Henshall checks back into the Sea View with his stepdaughter Effie for the holidays. Klassen brings her On Devonshire Shores series to a bright and merry conclusion with another impeccably researched and smartly written Regency-set historical that celebrates the hope and charity of the season.

JAQUELINE SNOWE
Date Night in December
"SNOWE BRINGS THE FEELS."
—Publishers Weekly
"London's characters come alive on every page and will steal your heart."—The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
While it was Snowing
New York Times Bestselling Author
Julia London

Art from *Christmas at the Ranch*, *Christmas People*, and *A Mannequin for Christmas*.

While It Was Snowing. By Julia London. Oct. 2025. Berkley.

When her best friend offers her the use of a luxurious lake house, single mom Amy Casey leaps at the chance to get away from her demanding family and spend some serious time working on her painting. However, injured professional golfer Harrison Neely has booked the lake house for the same time period, and he isn't about to move out. Served up with just the right dash of holiday kitsch and featuring a refreshingly older romantic couple, London's feel-good Christmas romance cleverly mixes love and laughter.

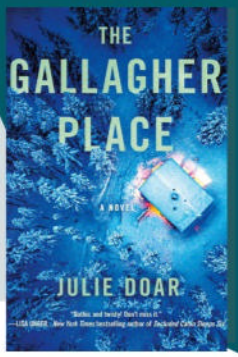
You Make It Feel Like Christmas. By Sophie Sullivan. Sept. 2025. St. Martin's/Griffin.

Maisie Smart is looking forward to spending the holidays with her family at Tickle Tree Farms until she discovers one of the other guests is none other than Nicholas King, the San Jose Guardian hockey player with whom she enjoyed a one night fling six months ago. Fans of Hallmark Channel's holiday movies will find Sullivan's cozily comic Christmas contemporary romance to be equally delightful.

December 2025

The Top Ten Adult Fiction and Nonfiction Chosen Monthly by America's Library Staff

Find out more at www.LibraryReads.org

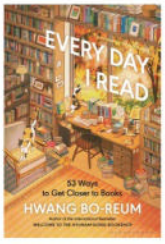


TOP PICK

The Gallagher Place
Julie Doar
(Zibby Publishing)

Marlowe is used to the drama that comes with spending holidays with her family, but nothing's come as close to blowing her world apart like this visit. When she and her brothers stumble upon a dead body, it leads to an investigation that may be tied to the decades old disappearance of her childhood best friend. Soon, no one's secrets will be safe.

—Sharon Layburn, South Huntington Public Library, NY



Every Day I Read: 53 Ways to Get Closer to Books
Hwang Bo-reum
(Bloomsbury)

This is a thought-provoking book all about the various aspects of books and reading. It's impossible to read this short book of essays without reflecting on the joys and comfort that reading brings. So many books are recommended in the essays that readers will want their TBR tracker handy!

—Kelly Davis, Waukesha Public Library, WI

Everyone in the Group Chat Dies
L.M. Chilton
(Gallery/Scout Press)

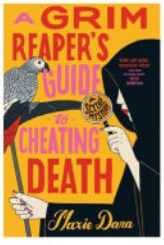
Kirby gets a message from a friend she's sure is dead. As she tries to connect with her other friends to figure out what's going on, disasters befall her and the group until she's in a race for her life. Witty, clever and creepy, this true-crime thriller is a fun, easy read for readers looking for something murderous that doesn't take itself too seriously.

—Carri Genovese, Indianapolis Public Library, IN

An Arcane Inheritance
Kamilah Cole
(Poisoned Pen Press)

Ellory gets a full ride to an Ivy League university and isn't sure why. Within weeks she's dog-tired and feels like she's losing her mind. Strange things are afoot, and she has a nagging sense of déjà vu. Exploring themes of racism and elitism, this dark academia delight stands out for great character development, a fast-moving plot, and unexpected twists.

—Kimberly McGee, Lake Travis Community Library, Austin, TX



A Grim Reaper's Guide to Cheating Death
Maxie Dara
(Berkley)

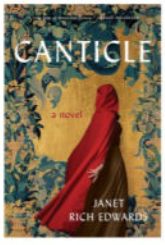
Nora is terrified of death but works for S.C.Y.T.H.E., a company that employs grim reapers. To complicate things further, her twin brother's file has shown up on her desk. To save him, the siblings go on the run with a parrot named Jessica. They find the perfect place to hide until she realizes it isn't just Capital-D Death after her brother, but someone else trying to kill him. An enjoyable romp.

—Vanneshia Crane, Love County Library, OH

Dark Sisters
Kristi DeMeester
(St. Martin's Press)

This fast-paced, terrifying work of historical horror is unapologetically feminist and told in alternating chapters across three timelines: Camilla in 2207, Mary in 1953, and Anna in 1750 Readers will be compelled to learn the women's secrets and the origin of the powerful church called The Patch. Recommended for fans of books about witches and women's power.

—Lila Denning, St. Petersburg Library System, FL



Canticle: A Novel
Janet Rich Edwards
(Spiegel & Grau)

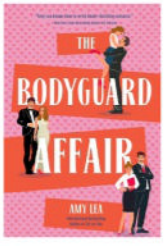
An intriguing historical fiction about a woman who, from a young age, is called to God. Set in 13th century Bruges, this is a particularly timely look at gender politics, especially as they relate to religion—how far will men go to hold on to their power and standing, and to what lengths will a woman go to serve her god? A great pick for book clubs.

—Jayna McDaniel-Browning, Delaware County District Library, OH

The List of Suspicious Things
Jennie Godfrey
(Sourcebooks Landmark)

In the late 1970s, the Yorkshire Ripper casts a shadow of fear over the locals. A young girl, Miv, makes a list of suspicious things in hopes of capturing the Ripper. As Miv and her best friends focus on the secrets, hopes, and tragedies of her neighbors' lives, she discovers the links that connect them all. Will be good for book clubs.

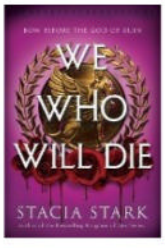
—Joan Hipp, LibraryReads Ambassador, NJ



The Bodyguard Affair
Amy Lea
(Berkley)

In this slow-burn dual POV romance, Andi is the assistant to the Canadian Prime Minister's wife by day and writes steamy romances under a pen name by night. When her novel, *The Prime Minister and Me*, comes out, people assume it is based in truth. In order to manage the PR disaster, Andi starts fake-dating the PM's bodyguard with whom she happens to have an awkward past. Very cute and cinematic.

—Cate Daily, Columbus Metropolitan Library, OH

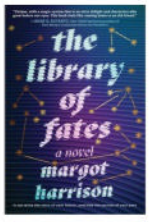


We Who Will Die
Stacia Stark
(Avon)

One of Arvelle's brothers needs life-saving medicine, and the only way to get it is to make an unbreakable pact with a vampire. Now she must survive gladiator-style games and get close enough to the King to fulfill her vow, or her brothers die. But why has the Primus taken a dislike to her, and why is he always masked? A great plot twist will hook readers.

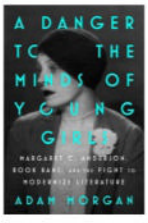
—Laura Sanders, Lafourche Parish Public Library, LA

Bonus pick:



The Library of Fates
Margot Harrison
(Graydon House)

Notable Nonfiction:



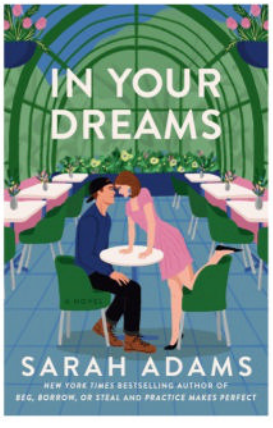
A Danger to the Minds of Young Girls: Margaret C. Anderson, Book Bans, and the Fight to Modernize Literature
Adam Morgan
(Atria/One Signal)

Be sure to check out our social media for the Bonus Pick annotations!

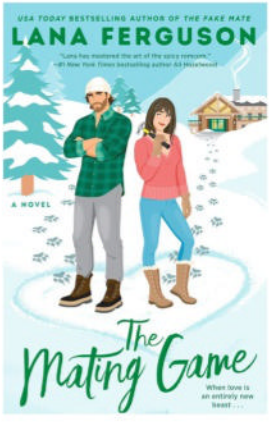
Made in LibraryAware - www.libraryaware.com

December 2025
HALL OF FAME TITLES

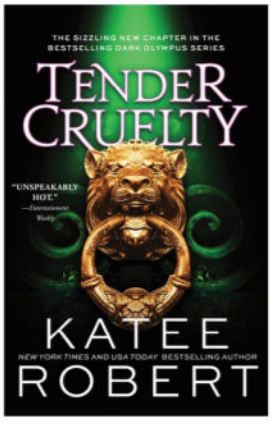
The LibraryReads Hall of Fame designation honors authors who have had multiple titles appear on the monthly list since 2013. As of the October 2018 list, when an author's third title places on a monthly list via library staff votes, the author moves into our Hall of Fame.



In Your Dreams: A Novel
Sarah Adams
(Dell)



The Mating Game
Lana Ferguson
(Berkley)


THE SIZZLING NEW CHAPTER IN THE BESTSELLING DARK OLYMPUS SERIES
TENDER CRUELTY
"UNSPEAKABLY HOT."
KATEE ROBERT
NEW YORK TIMES AND USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Tender Cruelty
Katee Robert
(Sourcebooks Casablanca)

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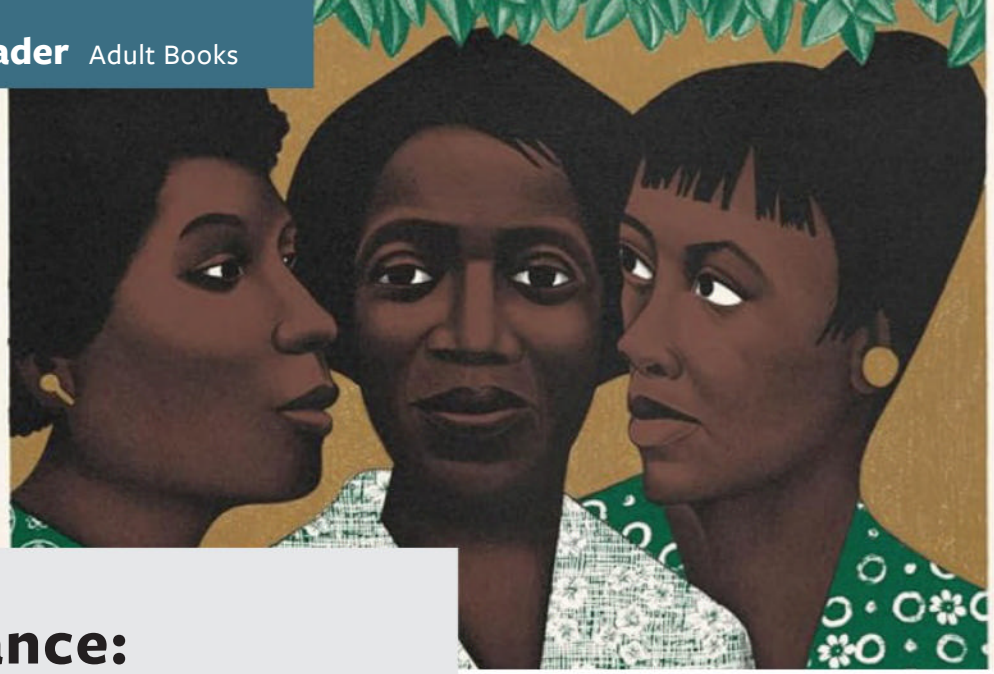


Art from *Misbehaving at the Crossroads.*

Resistance: Recent Topical Nonfiction

by Donna Seaman

These thoroughly researched and dramatic true stories chronicle the pursuit of justice pertaining to our constitutional rights on many fronts, from racial inequality to reproductive health, immigrant rights, the legal system, land use, and chemical pollution.

Access: Inside the Abortion Underground and the Sixty-Year Battle for Reproductive Freedom. By Rebecca Grant. 2025. Simon & Schuster/Avid Reader.

Grant documents the decades-long fight for abortion access and reproductive justice from pre-*Roe* to post-*Dobbs* in this clear and compelling blend of history and journalism.

Anatomy of a Con Artist: The 14 Red Flags to Spot Scammers, Grifters, and Thieves. By Johnathan Walton. 2025. Rodale.

After television producer Walton was defrauded by a professional con artist who was sent to prison, he made a podcast about it, *Queen of the Con: The Irish Heiress,* and now he empowers readers by calling out the "red flags" that identify someone as a scammer.

Bone Valley: A True Story of Injustice and Redemption in the Heart of Florida. By Gilbert King. 2025. Flatiron.

In 1989, Leo Schofield was wrongfully convicted for killing his wife. In 2023, he was finally granted parole after a lengthy reinvestigation of the case. Pulitzer Prize–winning King presents a superbly written study of this perversion of justice.

The Cost of Being Undocumented: One Woman's Reckoning with America's Inhumane Math. By Alix Dick and Antero Garcia. 2025. Beacon.

As the lives of immigrants, refugees, and our undocumented neighbors become ever more precarious, this book provides welcome insight and context as Alix Dick, who was hired by Garcia as a nanny, tells her story in a formidable yet candid and accessible exposé.

Dreaming of Home: How We Turn Fear into Pride, Power, and Real Change. By Cristina Jiménez. 2025. St. Martin's.

Jiménez, a MacArthur fellow, recounts her family's journey from Ecuador to the U.S. in pursuit of the American dream only to live in constant fear of deportation and traces her path from undocumented student to nationally recognized immigration-rights activist.

I Am Not Your Enemy. By Reality Winner. 2025. Spiegel & Grau.

Important, honest, and cautionary testimony from the whistleblower who spent five years in federal custody for leaking one classified document about Russian interference in the 2016 elections.

Misbehaving at the Crossroads: Essays and Writings. By Honorée Fanonne Jeffers. 2025. Harper.

Jeffers, author of the novel *The Love Songs of W. E. B. Du Bois*, presents a blend of personal essays, historical research, social commentary, and poetry in which she examines the various crossroads and pathways trod by Black women and the unique roles they hold in the story of America.

Murder the Truth: Threats, Intimidation, Fear, the First Amendment, and a Secret Campaign to Protect the Powerful. By David Enrich. 2025. Mariner.

With the rise of an archconservative political and judicial

class, long-held legal rulings that protect the freedom of the press are under scrutiny. Enrich elucidates the complex legal challenges to fact-based journalism that have been brought against long-established media and independent outlets.

Poisoning the Well: How Forever Chemicals Contaminated America. By Sharon Udasin and Rachel Frazin. 2025. Island.

In this eye-opening chronicle of the disastrous medical and environmental effects of forever chemicals, Udasin and Frazin explain the science and properties of PFAS, which number in the thousands and are used in all sorts of household products.

The Project: How Project 2025 Is Reshaping America. By David A. Graham. 2025. Random.

Graham whittles down the gargantuan Heritage Foundation playbook called *Project 2025* to create a handy and necessary guide for concerned citizens tracking the Trump administration's decimation of the federal government and democracy itself.

Queen Mother: Black Nationalism, Reparations, and the Untold Story of Audley Moore. By Ashley D. Farmer. 2025. Pantheon.

Audley Moore spent her life fighting for reparations, Black nationalism, and Black liberation. A charismatic speaker and talented organizer, she became a foremost figure in Black American resistance.

Stitching Freedom: A True Story of Injustice, Defiance, and Hope in Angola Prison. By Gary Tyler and Ellen Bravo. 2025. Atria/One Signal.

This riveting memoir of survival under the harrowing conditions of a decades-long wrongful imprisonment introduces a man of profound resolve who advocates for the rights of the incarcerated and learned the craft of embroidery as an outlet for his imagination and creativity.

Unbearable: Five Women and the Perils of Pregnancy in America. By Irin Carmon. 2025. Atria/One Signal.

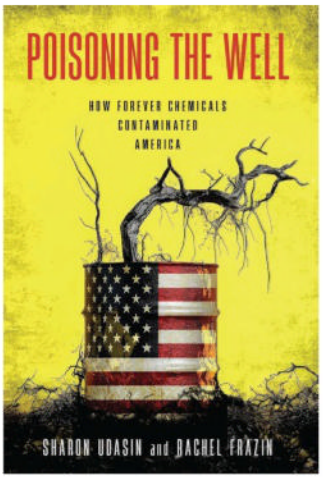
Carmon documents the experiences of five women from diverse backgrounds, places, and socioeconomic circumstances as they attempt to navigate the fallout from the 2022 overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.

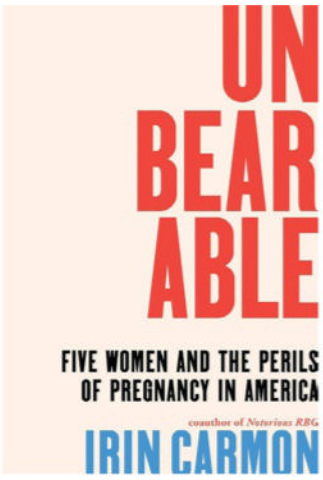
Voices from the Kitchen: Personal Narratives from New York's Immigrant Restaurant Workers. Ed. by Marc Meyer. 2025. Beacon.

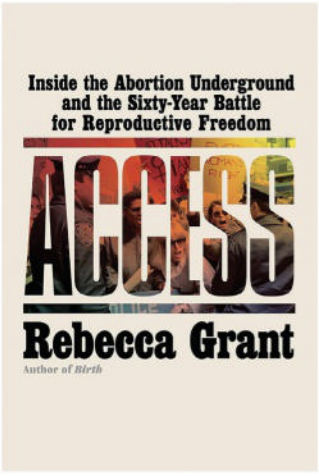
In a time of extreme governmental hostility against immigrants, chef Meyer celebrates the resilience and commitment of people who came to America seeking better lives and who contribute to society in this collection of frank and moving oral histories by New York restaurant workers from all around the world.

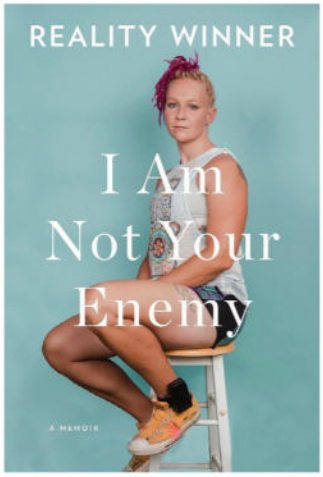
Wild on Purpose: The American Prairie Story and the Art of Thinking Bigger. By Sean Gerrity. 2025. Torrey House.

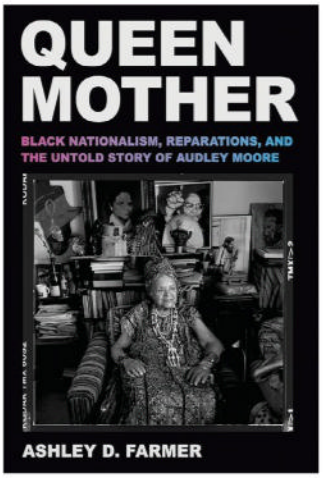
Gerrity illuminates the remarkable American Prairie project to restore a vast and complex prairie ecosystem, starting in Montana, in spite of outsized obstacles, and encourages readers to discover their own pathways to impactful, fulfilling lives.

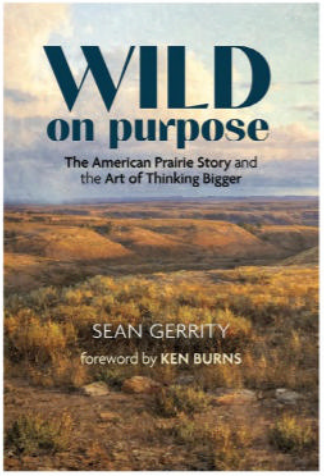





Inside the Abortion Underground and the Sixty-Year Battle for Reproductive Freedom
ACCESS
Rebecca Grant
Author of Birth







THE BOOKLIST INTERVIEW

NADIA LATIF AND WALTER MOSLEY

By Donna Seaman

Intrigued by the prospect of a film adaptation of Walter Mosley's complexly philosophical and unnerving novel, *The Man in My Basement*, one of his imaginative explorations beyond his trailblazing crime fiction, we jumped at the chance to speak with Mosley and Nadia Latif, a London-based theatermaker and director. This is her first feature film.

NADIA LATIF WALTER MOSLEY

SEAMAN: *Had you ever envisioned a film adaptation for* The Man in My Basement*?*

MOSLEY: Certainly at some point I did. But I try, when I'm writing a book, not to think about the book as a film, because then the writing starts to change, and not necessarily for the best.

SEAMAN: The Man in My Basement *came out in 2004, a year after* What Next: A Memoir Toward World Peace. *Was there any synergy between these two books?*

MOSLEY: Well, they're so different, but the feeling was the same; the feeling was bad, because *What Next* is about why are we waging this war against Afghanistan? And then Iraq. This makes no sense. So I wanted to say something about it. I tried to get in trouble; I didn't. *The Man in My Basement* was also very political, but that might just be me, not so much the subject.

SEAMAN: *Nadia, when did you first come across Walter's novel,* The Man in My Basement*?*

LATIF: I read it when it was published. I was at university and I saw it lying on a table; somebody had read it and left it for someone else to pick up. I would love to say I read it for a more profound reason than that I thought the cover and title were cool. I picked it up and finished it in probably 36 hours. I thought there was a slipperiness in it. Because you start off feeling like you're reading a really comfortable piece of fiction, and then you end up somewhere totally different, and that to me felt really exciting. And 21 years later, here we are!

SEAMAN: *How did this production come about?*

LATIF: I heard that another director's adaptation was in the offing. I was like, great, I'm going to see a movie of this book that I love. And then a couple of years passed and the movie didn't come out, and I asked my agent, "So whatever happened?" They said, "Oh, actually, they're looking for a director." I was in the middle of making my first short film, but I thought, *just get me in the room*. I don't know where I got the balls, but the balls were found and I went in and I pitched the hell out of it. I got flown to L.A. and I met Walter in this meeting room with a really weird table. Then we spent some time together with Walter working on the script, then I worked on the script. Walter has always been very generous with the idea that the book and the film are separate entities.

MOSLEY: Filmmaking is collaborative, while with novels, it's just you. For film, you're not just translating for an audience, but you are. You're not just translating for producers, but you are. You're not just translating for money, but you are. So it's translating back and forth when you're shooting a movie and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. Some films do very well by making something different from the book. In this case, I think that the concept of the book survived and exists in a beautiful film that was

also able to tell its own story, and I think that that's really wonderful.

SEAMAN: *Charles Blakey's spooky house, the film's primary setting, is perfect in every detail.*

LATIF: We built that house! That house is custom-made. We built two houses in a wood. I spent a lot of time in Sag Harbor, where the novel is set, and I spent a huge amount of time researching it. Sag Harbor has changed massively. So the house is a real space and it's a psychological space. It was really nice to be able to create a house that we felt did all the things we needed it to do. We shot partly in Wales and partly in Sag Harbor.

SEAMAN: *Did you know from the start that you wanted Willem Dafoe and Corey Hawkins in the lead roles: Dafoe as Anniston Bennet, the white man in the basement, and Hawkins as the Black homeowner, Charles Blakey?*

LATIF: There was a point, I think in 2021, when somebody asked me what type of actor was right for Anniston and I said, well, somebody like Willem Dafoe. As if Dafoe is going rock up into this film! But you know, somebody sent it to him and he read it and we got on a Zoom.

Corey I met through the casting process, and it was one of those experiences where your memory of everybody else just falls away. Nobody else exists. The rest of the cast were actors, generally, I've wanted to work with for years, a lot of them theater actors from the UK, and they were brilliant.

SEAMAN: *The story revolves around three African masks.*

LATIF: Yes, it's such a great classic image, isn't it? It's interesting that there's a huge conversation happening at the moment around restoring artifacts to their countries of origin. Mati Diop's amazing documentary, *Dahomey*, about restoring some artworks to Benin, brilliantly ends with students discussing whether things like those masks matter at all, which is sort of the argument in Walter's book and the film. These masks could represent a kind of magical past, but how does that help you pay your mortgage? Or how does it help you feel differently about yourself? The masks in the film are authentic; they're from Gabon.

MOSLEY: These passport masks were a way to identify yourself. And these weren't like something in the British Museum. In the story, these are masks that people brought over and people kept and eventually left them to Charles, who may be a descendant of theirs, maybe not; that's a harder thing to know. The idea is that what you had taken away from you is your culture and your language and what you have left is hardly anything.

SEAMAN: *Books are central to your lives. Have libraries been important to you, too?*

LATIF: My mother's a children's librarian in London. I'm from Sudan, and my mum ran a school there and she was a librarian there, too. I'm an artist because my mother thrust book after book after book into my hands. When we came to London, we went to the public library around the corner from our house. As a theatermaker, I feel that the physical buildings are really important, and people being in those spaces is really important. We've got to find many different ways for people to keep reading. In the film, Charles goes to the library! That's because the library is, well, very important!

MOSLEY: Librarians are the front-line proponents of freedom of speech. Librarians will protect me and they will protect what I create and what I support. And they're also very involved in the future. If people want computers, we're going to get a whole bunch of computers. Whatever people need, it becomes part of the library. The library is always growing with the mind. And I think that is wonderful.

Top 10

Historical Fiction

These top 10 historical fiction titles cover locales from Washington, DC, to Nigeria to France, and time periods from the Protestant Reformation to the Harlem Renaissance to the mod era in London, exploring themes and revealing truths that transcend geography and time.

Another Man in the Streets. By Caryl Phillips. 2025. Farrar.

A boy leaves St. Kitts with dreams of becoming a newspaperman in 1960s London in this heartbreaking novel that contrasts the long shadows of colonialism and WWII with the shininess of the mod era.

The Briar Club. By Kate Quinn. 2024. Morrow.

This compulsively readable novel shifts perspectives among the residents of a boarding house in Washington, DC, and explores gender roles, romance, money woes, and the shadow of McCarthyism.

Harlem Rhapsody. By Victoria Christopher Murray. 2025. Berkley.

Using meticulous research, this biographical novel focuses on Jessie Redmon Fuaset, the so-called "midwife of the Harlem Renaissance," who edited the NAACP's influential magazine and had a complicated relationship with its founder, W. E. B. DuBois.

Isola. By Allegra Goodman. 2025. Dial.

In this sixteenth-century castaway tale, a pair of lovers and a loving nurse are abandoned on a small island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence; a lush and enthralling story of suffering, strength, and redemption.

The Modern Fairies. By Clare Pollard. 2024. Simon & Schuster/Avid Reader.

The happiness of a female-led salon, featuring real-life figures who present unique spins on fairy tales, is threatened by a spy on the eve of the French Revolution.

The Road to the Country. By Chigozie Obioma. 2024. Hogarth.

Combining breathtaking beauty with the horrors of war, Obioma follows a young man who, out of guilt and obligation, searches for his brother (who relies on a wheelchair), but is waylaid by the Biafran army.

The Trial of Anna Thalberg. By Eduardo Sangarcía. Tr. by Elizabeth Bryer. 2024. Restless.

A red-haired, honey-eyed wife is accused of witchcraft by a jealous villager during the Protestant Reformation in a translated novel that is frightfully inventive and disturbingly accurate.

The Unbecoming of Margaret Wolf. By Isa Arsén. 2025. Putnam.

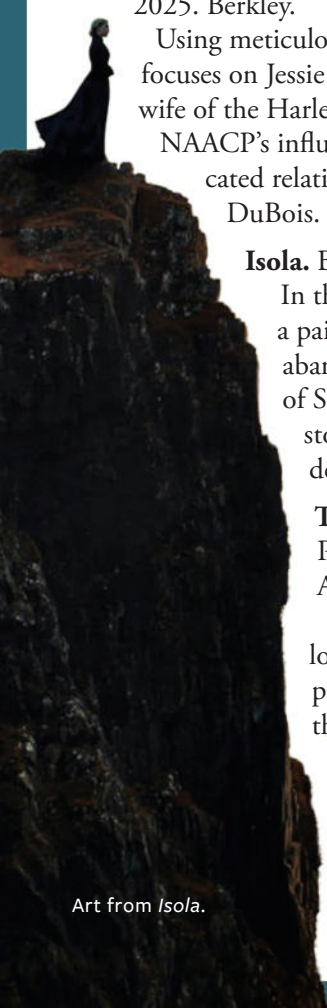
A Shakespearean actress in 1955 faces her inner demons while married to a gay colleague, with whom she shares mutual respect and genuine concern, in a novel that is infused with light magical realism.

The Unexpected Diva. By Tiffany L. Warren. 2025. Morrow.

A gifted, tenacious African American vocalist with a three-octave range longs to study in Europe, but it is the 1850s, so she seizes the chance to tour the northern U.S. and Canada, which is not without its dangers.

The Wildes. By Louis Bayard. 2024. Algonquin.

This poignant portrayal of Oscar Wilde and his family, featuring crackling dialogue, is presented as a drama in five acts, in the prelude and aftermath of the sexual scandal that sent him to prison.

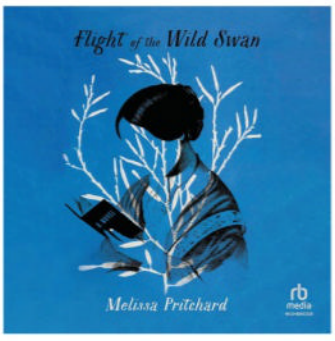


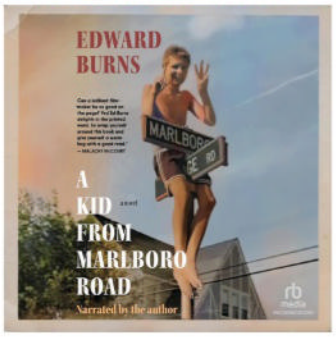
Art from *Isola*.

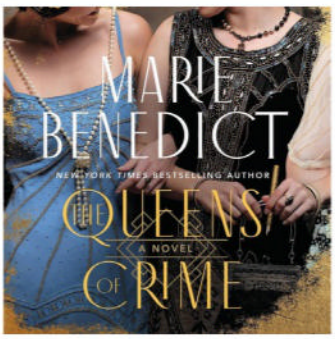
Top 10

Historical Fiction on Audio

Autofiction and revisiting familiar characters and time periods are the rich scores upon which skilled narrators weave their work in this year's list.







Daughters of Shandong. By Eve J. Chung. Read by Yu-Li Alice Shen. 2024. Books on Tape.

Shen impressively enlivens a cast of dispersed Chinese women of three generations from 1948 onward, each individual effortlessly distinguished from every other.

Flight of the Wild Swan. By Melissa Pritchard. Read by Jayne Entwistle. 2024. HighBridge.

Entwistle's Florence Nightingale is an excellent woman to spend time with: fierce, brilliant, furious about the limitations placed on her sex, petulant, impatient with family, and relentless in pursuit of the life she has envisioned for herself.

A Home for Friendless Women. By Kelly E. Hill. Read by a full cast. 2024. Books on Tape.

Nineteenth-century Kentucky isn't particularly kind to young, single, pregnant women. Three distinctive narrators voice these women's imagined backstories, resurrecting tragedies but also reclaiming resilience, defiance, and strength.

A Kid from Marlboro Road. By Edward Burns. Read by the author. 2024. Recorded Books.

Actor and filmmaker Burns' first novel draws heavily on his Irish Catholic upbringing on Long Island. With his husky, New York accent, Burns' wise guy–styled storyteller lends an omniscience that comes from years of perspective and lived experience.

Lady Macbeth. By Ava Reid. Read by Imani Jade Powers. 2024. Books on Tape.

Reid's spin on the Scottish Play takes the perspective of Roscille. Powers' English-accented narration captures the brooding mood of the setting, the ingenuity of Roscille, and the chilling cadence of those witches locked in the dungeon.

Long Island. By Colm Tóibín. Read by Jessie Buckley. 2024. Simon & Schuster Audio.

In the 1970s small-town Irish setting, the protagonist must navigate delicate circumstances where much depends on coincidence and other people. Irish actor Buckley narrates with the authenticity of an insider.

The Paris Gown. By Christine Wells. Read by Saskia Maarleveld. 2024. HarperAudio.

Parisian fashion, love, friendship, and deception make a delectable combination, and Maarleveld's articulate performance lends credibility in setting the scene, using accents to keep the reader on track with characters from Paris, America, and Australia.

The Queens of Crime. By Marie Benedict. Read by Bessie Carter. Feb. 2025. Macmillan Audio.

Benedict delivers another entertaining dive into the undercover lives of historical women. Here, in Carter's cunning narration, jazz-age British mystery writers have all the zing and raised eyebrows one expects that they would.

Tiananmen Square. By Lai Wen. Read by Jocelyn Tam. 2024. Spiegel & Grau.

Narrator Jocelyn Tam moves listeners in this autobiographical novel set in Beijing during the 1970s and '80s. Her gentle narration captures the complex family dynamics during a difficult time in China's history.

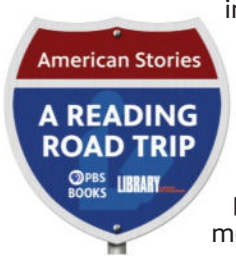
The Titanic Survivors Book Club. By Timothy Schaffert. Read by Max Meyers. 2024. Books on Tape.

A group of ticket holders who skipped the trip form an unlikely book club in Paris. Such a vast cast must be a thrilling challenge for a versatile narrator, and Meyers flourishes in the role.

PBS BOOKS

American Stories: A Reading Road Trip goes to Alaska and Indiana

Buckle up and join PBS Books and the Library of Congress as we journey into *Alaska on American Stories: A Reading Road Trip*! From the rugged peaks of Denali to the shimmering northern lights, discover the wild landscapes and resilient voices behind unforgettable stories. Along the way, hear from contemporary authors and visit literary landmarks, libraries, and beloved bookstores unique to the Last Frontier. Don't miss this adventure on December 3 at 8:00 p.m. ET.



Then, travel back to the Midwest as we make a pit stop in Indiana. From rolling farmlands to the bustling streets of Indianapolis, explore the voices and tales rooted in the heartland, hear from local authors, and visit libraries, bookstores, and other literary treasures. Join the journey through the Hoosier State on December 10 at 8:00 p.m. ET. These shows can we watched on the PBS Books Facebook page, PBS Books YouTube channel, pbsbooks.org, the PBS app, or pbs.org. Learn more at pbsbooks.org/readingroadtrip.

PBS BOOKS READERS CLUB

PBS Books Readers Club Favorite Books of 2025

To wrap up the year, PBS Books Readers Club celebrates our favorite books of 2025! Join Lauren, Fred, Princess, and Heather as they revisit unforgettable moments from this year's author interviews. From powerful stories of women breaking boundaries and shaping history like Kristin Hannah's *The Women* and Bonnie Garmus' *Lessons in Chemistry*, to laugh-out-loud classics like Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and even spine-tingling mysteries like Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *The Bewitching*, our hosts will share insights, surprising stories, and plenty of inspiration. Plus, all four hosts share their favorite reads from the year. The show premieres on December 17 at 8:00 p.m. ET on the PBS Books Facebook page, PBS Books YouTube channel, pbsbooks.org, the PBS app, or pbs.org.

All PBS Books programs are free to view.

Visit pbsbooks.org for details, schedules, and links to watch live or on-demand.

Bring PBS Screeners to Your Library with PBS Books

PBS Books is helping bring exclusive PBS screener opportunities to libraries across the country, giving patrons a chance to view our acclaimed documentaries, specials, and author events. If your library is interested in hosting a screening of PBS films and shows, you can sign up online at pbsbooks.org/resources or contact Heather Montilla at hmontilla@pbsbooks.org. These screeners are a great way to engage your community, spark discussion, and share the magic of storytelling with readers and viewers of all ages.

Program Highlights

Santa's Wild Home Premieres on PBS

This holiday season, discover the real North Pole. *Nature* takes viewers on a breathtaking journey to the true land of Santa Claus. *Santa's Wild Home* invites audiences to explore Lapland — the northernmost region of mainland Europe — where the magic of the holidays meets the raw beauty of nature. Green lights shimmer across the Arctic sky, snow sparkles on the trees, and beneath the festive myths lies a wilderness teeming with life. Here, reindeer, wolves, owls, eagles, and brown bears endure one of Earth's harshest environments — surviving freezing temperatures, endless darkness, and the challenges of the changing seasons.

Narrated by Scott Brick and written and directed by Matt Hamilton, this one-hour *Nature* special explores life beyond myth, revealing the extraordinary resilience of Lapland's wildlife. From the thunder of migrating reindeer to the stealth of the Eurasian lynx and the endurance of musk oxen, each moment captures the wonder and struggle of life in this frozen realm. Among the film's most unforgettable scenes are: mass migration of hundreds of thousands of reindeer, mother brown bear teaching her cubs to hunt, and a great gray owl flying over a thousand miles to feed her demanding owlets.

In Lapland, myth and reality intertwine. Once believed to be the trail of a mythical fire fox, the Northern Lights now illuminate a habitat where the toughest creatures endure. Even beneath the ice, orca whales hunt in coordinated packs, stunning herring with the slap of their tails.

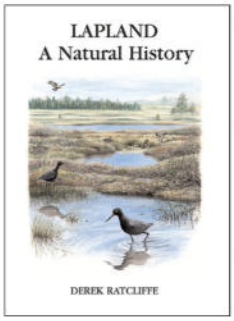
This arctic adventure looks at Santa's true home and the remarkable wildlife that thrives there on PBS (check your local listing), on pbs.org, and the PBS app.

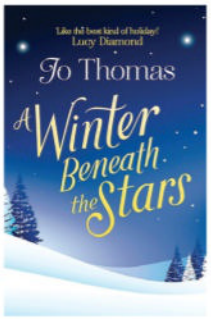
Inspired by this episode, try one of our book picks:

Lapland: A Natural History, by Derek Ratcliffe.

The Palace of the Snow Queen: Winter Travels in Lapland, by Barbara Sjoholm.

A Winter Beneath the Stars, by Jo Thomas.





Must-Listen

Sci-Tech Audio for All

by Heather Booth

Audio is a great format for dipping your toes into the world of science and technology. Enthusiastic narrators and engaging delivery pull listeners into these sometimes complex, always curious narratives that seek to explain the world around us.

Art from *The Backyard Bird Chronicles.*

Adult

The Backyard Bird Chronicles. By Amy Tan. Read by the author and David Allen Sibley. 2024. Books on Tape.

In her melodic, refreshing voice, renowned novelist Tan shifts toward personal observations of nature and contemplations of morality and mortality. In this soothing chronicle of hope, Tan's narration communicates endless patience and resourcefulness, spiced with self-reflective, teasing humor.

Circumstances Affecting the Heat of the Sun's Rays. By Amanda Quaid. Performed by a full cast. 2025. L.A. Theatre Works.

Eunice Foote, the central character in this play, published her research on greenhouse gases three years before the man largely credited with their discovery. Vignettes show Foote and her family living a vibrant, intellectual life while she balances motherhood, science, and the strain of sexism. This is a marvelously dramatic audio production and commentary on ecology and the industrial revolution.

Cloud Warriors: Deadly Storms, Climate Chaos—and the Pioneers Creating a Revolution in Weather Forecasting. By Thomas E. Weber. Read by Keith Brown. 2025. Tantor.

Brown enthusiastically narrates this fascinating audiobook about the emerging science and technology behind weather forecasting. This is a timely listen about the important work done by the institutions tasked with anticipating weather and climate disasters and keeping us safe.

Everything Is Tuberculosis: The History and Persistence of Our Deadliest Infection. By John Green. Read by the author. 2025. Books on Tape.

Green, known widely as a YouTuber and successful YA novelist, uses his sensitive insights and narrative talents to tell the story of tuberculosis. Woven into the details is the story of Henry, an engaging young man in Sierra Leone fighting the disease. Green reads with an earnestness and warmth that will touch listeners' hearts.

Lights On: How Understanding Consciousness Helps Us Understand the Universe. By Annaka Harris. Read by a full cast. 2025. Macmillan Audio.

In this audio documentary, an audio-original, Harris openly seeks to understand exactly what consciousness is. For such a complicated topic, the audio format is actually ideal! Conversations and debates without a single clear answer are interspersed throughout and sound effects pull the listener's attention to specific points and sometimes illustrate ideas.

Youth

Farmer Eva's Green Garden Life. By Jacqueline Briggs Martin. Read by Eva Kaminsky and Eva Sommaripa. 2025. Live Oak. Gr. 2–5.

A quiet picture book about an herb farmer becomes a symphony of natural sounds. The calls of birds, the buzz of bees, the *scritch* of a spade turning the earth, and a squeaky wheelbarrow all bring the vibrant farm environment to the listener.

I Hear the Snow, I Smell the Sea. By Janice Milusich. Read by Jorjeana Marie. 2025. Listening Library. Gr. PreK–3.

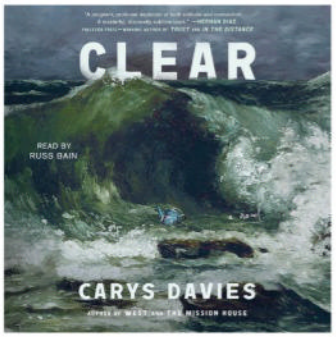
How do we experience the changing seasons and the world around us? This gentle narrative walks children through the ways a little girl who can't see still observes nature and the special things it brings season by season.

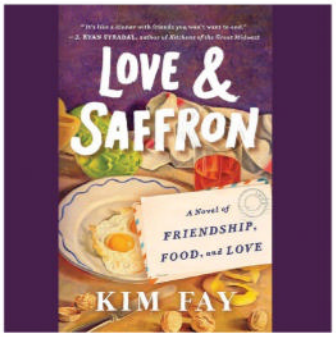
Listen Up

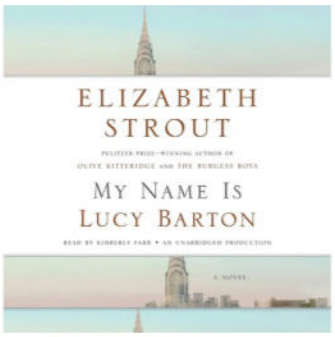
Brief Audio for Busy Days

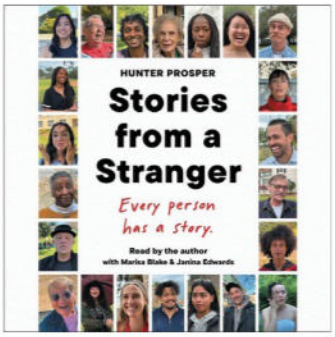
by Heather Booth

December may have 31 days, but they never seem to be enough for getting everything done before the year's end. This makes it a great month for sneaking short, sweet audiobooks—none more that three-and-a-half hours—into your routine. Each of these offers a quiet, contemplative respite from the bustle of this busy month.









Clear. By Carys Davies. Read by Russ Bain. 2024. Simon & Schuster Audio.

On a sea-ravaged Scottish island, Ivar is the only man remaining after the rest of his community has passed on or moved to the mainland. The young minister charged with evacuating him needs Ivar's help, and together they find a curious common language and personal connection.

Gmorning, Gnight! Little Pep Talks for Me & You. By Lin-Manuel Miranda. Read by the author. 2018. Books on Tape.

It doesn't take long for Miranda's infectious energy and sincerity to make a big impression! Begun as tweets, these micro-pep talks, read in the Broadway phenom's own voice, are upbeat and reassuring; and at a mere 46 minutes, they're something to come back to time and again.

Liturgies for Hope: Sixty Prayers for the Highs, the Lows, and Everything in Between. By Audrey Elledge and Elizabeth Moore. Read by Audrey Elledge and a full cast. 2022. Books on Tape.

Created for believers and non-believers during the early days of the pandemic by the Church of New York City, these liturgies are small treasures to support praise, worship, and prayer experiences.

Love & Saffron. By Kim Fay. Read by a full cast. 2022. Books on Tape.

In the 1960s, a friendship between two food writers at very different stages of life begins in letters, grows over years, and changes both women and those around them forever. A warm, well-voiced literary respite to listen to while preparing the big meals of the month.

My Name Is Lucy Barton. By Elizabeth Strout and Rona Munro. Read by Laura Linney. 2020. Books on Tape.

This one-woman-show adaptation of Strout's novel lets Linney (known for *Ozark* on Netflix, the holiday classic *Love, Actually,* and much more) showcase her broad theatrical skills as she portrays a strained relationship between Lucy and her mother at a vulnerable moment.

Simply More: A Book for Anyone Who Has Been Told They're Too Much. By Cynthia Erivo. Read by the author. 2025. Macmillan Audio.

A rare glimpse into the very private personal life of the Broadway star whose singular talents make her an obviously superb narrator. In her stream-of-consciousness style, Erivo repeatedly asks listeners guiding questions as well as commanding us to, in light of her life story, discover our own passion, community, coping mechanisms, and personal style.

Stories from a Stranger: Every Person Has a Story. By Hunter Prosper. Read by a full cast. 2025. Simon & Schuster Audio.

Prosper is an ICU nurse who uses social media to share deep, contemplative conversations with strangers. Here, he has collected a number of them that will pull at your heartstrings. Skilled narrators support the emotional monologues with the interview subjects.

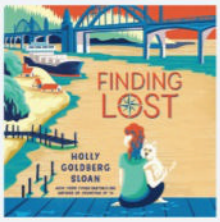
Listen-alikes

Finding Lost by Holly Goldberg Sloan

by Heather Booth

For some kids, there's no friend better than an animal friend. In *Finding Lost*, Cordy's transformative relationship with a lost dog helps her navigate changes in her life. Whether it's a domesticated pet that sleeps at the foot of your bed or a massive creature of the wild, offering constant companionship or life lessons, the emotional narrations here display the bond between kids and their animals.

Finding Lost. By Holly Goldberg Sloan. Read by Khaya Fraites. 2025. Listening Library. Gr. 4–7.



Life since Cordy's father's death in a workplace boating accident has been marked by change for her small family. Their home is a cozy converted boathouse adjacent to the luxury vacation rental for which her mother is a caretaker. Within the beauty and wonder of her waterfront Oregon home, Cordy finds connection with her brother, a friend, and through books, but when a lost dog comes to stay and becomes Lost, the dog, she is led to even more connections and love—though not without challenges along the way. Fraites is an ideal narrator for this middle-grade novel of friendship, self-discovery, and love between a girl and her dog. Her youthful voice portrays all the worry, eagerness, heartbreak, and hopefulness of Cordy's first-person narration. A frequent narrator in full-cast fantasy adaptations and on video games, Fraites' range easily adapts to this single-voiced perspective in its sweet setting and gentle themes. Young listeners will find resonance, as Fraites' empathy with Cordy is clear, consistent, and convincing. Share this audio with middle-grade students eager to have their big feelings validated, who appreciate their furry friends, and want to use fiction to navigate grief, their changing lives, and burgeoning maturity. —*Heather Booth*

Allergic. By Megan Wagner Lloyd and Michelle Mee Nutter. Read by a full cast. 2021. Scholastic. Gr. 4–6.

This engaging graphic novel about a girl whose allergies keep her from having the pets of her dreams receives a first-rate full-cast audio treatment. We hear Maggie's every frustration, hope, and sneeze, and thanks to expertly mixed recording effects and a bouncy score, the production sounds like a radio drama.

Charlotte's Web. By E. B. White. Read by Meryl Streep and a full cast. 2019. Listening Library. Gr. 3–7.

This marks the first recording of the classic since White's narration nearly 50 years ago. Streep and her castmates have voices as varied as the farm animals. Children and adults alike will giggle at the geese's stutters and the sheep's prolonged vowels, which capture the energy that made readers fall in love with the story in the first place. A top-notch recording of a beloved book and a must for all audio collections.

Elf Dog and Owl Head. By M. T. Anderson. Read by Pete Cross. 2023. Dreamscape. Gr. 3–6.

When a beautiful dog appears out of nowhere during the drudgery of pandemic lockdown, Clay assumes that her owner will claim her. But wherever the graceful Elpherine runs, the woods surrounding the family home become enchanted. Cross' narration vibrates with danger and the boundless mystery of Clay and this fantastical dog.

Manatee Summer. By Evan Griffith. Read by Mark Turetsky. 2022. HarperAudio. Gr. 4–6.

Peter is determined to protect the manatee he finds in the local canal, despite run-ins with his arch nemesis. Themes of loss, friendship, transition, and activism make this especially appealing to children navigating complex changes in family dynamics, and students interested in marine life.

Song for a Whale. By Lynne Kelly. Read by Abigail Revasch and Lynne Kelly. 2019. Listening Library. Gr. 4–6.

When Iris learns about a whale that can't communicate because its voice is on a different frequency from that of other whales, she feels an instant connection—she is Deaf and also struggles to communicate. Revasch superbly captures headstrong Iris in this Odyssey-honored audio. Interludes narrated from the whale's point of view are voiced with deep and contemplative tones.

Sputnik's Guide to Life on Earth. By Frank Cottrell Boyce. Read by Peter Capaldi. 2019. Walden Pond Press. Gr. 3–6.

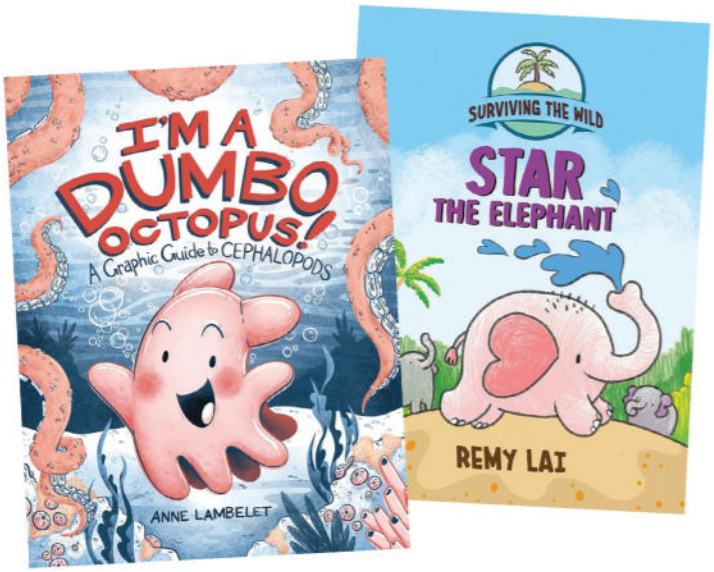
The same day Prez arrives as a foster kid on a Scottish farm, so does Sputnik. To all others, Sputnik looks like a dog and sounds like a dog, but Prez sees clearly that he is an alien. Capaldi infuses life into this work with so much exuberance one can't help laughing out loud while listening!

Read-alikes

Narwhal & Jelly

by Sarah Hunter

The tenth book in Ben Clanton's beloved, best-selling Narwhal & Jelly series, *A Waffle Lot of Love*, comes out this month, and it's full to bursting with playful cartoon artwork, lots of puns, marine-science facts, and an unhinged number of waffles. Clanton's loose but energetic cartoon artwork manages a kind of kids-comics alchemy, conjuring lively, well-paced humor out of minimal ink-strokes. It's a formula that's worked for 10 books, but 10 books can go by in a blink for eager readers. Here are more series starters that have similar qualities.



Donut Feed the Squirrels. By Mika Song. Art by the author. 2020. Random/RH Graphic. Gr. 1–4.

This first book in the Norma and Belly series stars the titular squirrel sisters as they try to sneak doughnuts from a food truck, and chaos ensues. Song's simple drawing style, open panels, and animal-buddy high jinks will be an easy sell for Clanton fans.

Elena Rides. By Juana Medina. Illus. by the author. 2023. Candlewick. PreS–Gr. 1.

Medina uses a similarly simple drawing style to depict a wide range of emotion as indigo elephant Elena attempts to ride a bike while being cheered on by her small bird pal. Both this and its sequel, *Elena Camps*, are available in Spanish and bilingual editions.

I'm a Dumbo Octopus! A Graphic Guide to Cephalopods. By Anne Lambelet. Illus. by the author. 2025. Lerner/Graphic Universe. Gr. 2–5.

While this is written at a somewhat higher reading level than Clanton's series, the playful cartoon art style and wry humor enliven a surprisingly comprehensive overview of Narwhal and Jelly's marine neighbors, which will thrill kids who are drawn to the series' animal facts.

Shark Princess. By Nidhi Chanani. Art by the author. 2022. 80p. Viking. K–Gr. 3.

Kitana (a whale shark) and Mack (a mako shark) embark on episodic undersea adventures just like Narwhal and Jelly. Chanani folds shark facts and a boatload of puns into her large, richly colored panels, which engagingly capture the coral reef setting in this three-book series.

Sir Ladybug. By Corey R. Tabor. Art by the author. 2022. HarperCollins. Gr. 1–3.

Pitch-perfect comedic timing fills the panels of Geisel-medalist Tabor's three-book comic series about a noble ladybug who, along with his trusty companions, embarks on such quests as helping his garden neighbors, dealing with a mean queen bee, and returning a library book.

Surviving the Wild: Star the Elephant. By Remy Lai. Art by the author. 2022. Holt. Gr. 1–3.

Inspired by the stories of real animals facing danger, Lai uses soft, rounded artwork to recount how each animal made it to safety. While there's not as much humor in this series, Narwhal & Jelly fans who love the interspersed facts will appreciate the science woven throughout Lai's trio of titles.

Art from *Donut Feed the Squirrels.*

Top 10

Historical Fiction for Youth

Poignant, fictionalized experiences of hardship, adventure, and care across old and new history make up this list of top titles.

Adventures of Mary Jane. By Hope Jahren. 2024. Delacorte. Gr. 9–12.

Mary Jane of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is the star of this adventure tale, in which she must travel 400 miles south to care for her ailing and distraught family.

Everything Is Poison. By Joy McCullough. 2025. Dutton. Gr. 9–12.

As Carmela ventures into apprenticeship at her mother's apothecary, she quickly learns there's more darkness to the work—and more venomous realities of the world—than she imagined.

Art from *Will's Race for Home.*

The Gift of the Great Buffalo. By Carole Lindstrom. Illus. by Aly McKnight. 2025. Bloomsbury. PreS–Gr. 2.

Young Métis-Ojibwe Rose heads out on her own to track down the buffalo herd and save her community from the long winter ahead in atmospheric illustrations that capture the sacredness of the buffalo hunt.

The House before Falling into the Sea. By Ann Suk Wang. Illus. by Hanna Cha. 2024. Dial. Gr. 1–3.

During the Korean War, Kyung and her parents give refugee families food and shelter by taking them into their home on the southeast coast of Korea.

Ida, in Love and in Trouble. By Veronica Chambers. 2024. Little, Brown. Gr. 9–12.

This adaptation of the life of civil rights activist Ida B. Wells beautifully imagines what her time as a young adult was like, considering her relationships and activist engagements alike.

The Peach Thief. By Linda Joan Smith. 2025. Candlewick. Gr. 5–8.

Set in 1850 England, this gorgeously written debut follows 13-year-old orphan Scilla as she finds meaningful work in a garden while disguised as a boy, following a peach-stealing incident.

They Call Me Teach: Lessons in Freedom. By Lesa Cline-Ransome. Illus. by James E. Ransome. 2024. Candlewick. K–Gr. 3.

On a Southern plantation in the early 1860s, a young enslaved man who can read risks his life by secretly teaching others and, occasionally, helping them escape.

Through Sand and Salt: A Tale of Discovery across the Sahara. By Elizabeth Zunon. Illus. by the author. 2025. Bloomsbury. Gr. 1–4.

In this eye-opening journey, Malik proudly accompanies his father on a camel caravan transporting salt across the Sahara, bringing thoughtful attention to the Tuareg people.

Where the Heart Should Be. By Sarah Crossan. 2025. Greenwillow. Gr. 8–11.

Crossan's breathtaking novel in verse examines the class struggles of the Irish potato famine through the star-crossed romance of Irish commoner Nell and English noble John.

Will's Race for Home. By Jewell Parker Rhodes. 2025. Little, Brown. Gr. 3–6.

Hoping to leave sharecropping behind, Will and his father brave the dangers of racism and an arduous route in their journey to Oklahoma to claim land during the Reconstruction era.

Manga Essentials

History, Fact and Fiction

by Sara Smith

Manga fans interested in the past will appreciate these recent and classic series that present historical periods in compelling stories supported by a wealth of illuminating historical context.

Art from *Asadora!*

Asadora! By Naoki Urasawa. Art by the author. VIZ Media. Gr 9–12.

This series opens in 1959 with violent Typhoon Vera bearing down on Japan along with a mysterious and unexplainable kaiju attack, which takes out most of Asa's village. Next, readers travel to 1964, when Asa is deputized to save the opening of the Tokyo Olympics from this same kaiju attack before the Americans can become involved and loose another nuclear weapon.

Barefoot Gen. By Keiji Nakazawa. Art by the author. Last Gasp. Gr 10–12.

Based on Nakazawa's personal survival of the bombing of Hiroshima, this classic 10-volume series, originally published in the 1970s–'80s, follows Gen, a small boy living with his family while WWII engulfs his country. The violence separates the family, turns neighbors on one another, and ultimately leads to the horrific tragedy readers will know is coming for his city.

A Bride's Story. By Kaoru Mori. Art by the author. Yen Press. Gr 10–12.

Set near the Caspian Sea in the nineteenth century, this story intertwines the advancement of the Russian Empire to overtake Central Asia, eventually establishing Russian Turkestan, with the experiences of Amir, a 20-year-old bride from a tribe across the mountain, who has come to marry 12-year-old Karluk. The two grow together as Karluk continues to grow up and Amir learns her new family's and tribe's customs.

In This Corner of the World. By Fumiyo Kouno. Art by the author. Seven Seas. Gr 6–12.

Suzu, a young girl from the country, enters into an arranged marriage with a naval officer who is stationed in shipyards outside Kure, near Hiroshima. She leads a mostly quiet life looking after his home and nurturing her hobby of making art. She watches with sadness as WWII tears her country apart, but she continues to hope for a good future.

Moriarty the Patriot. By Ryosuke Takeuchi. Illustrated by Hikaru Miyoshi. VIZ Media. Gr 10–12.

In this book set in the late nineteenth century in London, William Moriarty's main goal is to bring down the corrupt nobility of the British Empire, whom he believes have structured Britain's society to limit economic mobility. Along his quest, he meets an arch nemesis: Sherlock Holmes. This interesting series provides a new perspective on the classic tale from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Okinawa. By Susumu Higa. Art by the author. Fantagraphics. Gr 9–12.

This two-part collection of short stories focuses on the devastating months around the Battle of Okinawa, based on Higa's own family history. The second collection loosely stars a Yuta priestess who performs several rites to heal the spiritual soul of the island and the people. Many of the stories wrestle with the identity of the island's people and the effect the war has had on them.

The Rose of Versailles. By Riyoko Ikeda. Illustrations by the author. UDON Entertainment. Gr 9–12.

This lavishly illustrated classic manga follows the court drama of the final days of Marie de Antionette during the French Revolution. The story weaves accounts of historical figures together with fictional characters to create a sensational romance set against a ticking clock of the monarch's ultimate demise.

Vinland Saga. By Makoto Yukimura. Illustrated by the author. Kodansha. Gr 10–12.

Thorfinn is a Viking warrior desperate for revenge against the man who killed his father, but instead of getting it, he finds himself aboard his father's killer's ship and along for their many journeys across what is now modern-day England. The series doesn't shy away from the violence Vikings were known for and incorporates both historical and fictional characters.

Art from *Genocide and Propaganda*.

Essentials

Understanding Propaganda

by Julia Smith

The banning and censorship of books is often only one part of a wider project to limit access to information. Censorship can go hand-in-hand with political propaganda, which hinges on manipulating peoples' views and understanding of history and current events. It's important for kids and teens to recognize propaganda when they see it, and the following works of nonfiction and fiction demonstrate when and how propaganda is used, as well as potential consequences of its influence.

Nonfiction

Big Lies: From Socrates to Social Media. By Mark Kurlansky. Illus. by Eric Zelz. 2022. Tilbury. Gr. 8–12.

This well-researched look at propaganda techniques offers a broad view of how and why political leaders, hucksters, and others with personal or political agendas lie; how technological changes and the advent of social media have magnified the lies' effectiveness; and how critical-thinking skills enable people to recognize the big lies that can threaten a free society.

Can Posters Kill? Antisemitic Propaganda and World War II. By Jerry Faivish and Kathryn Cole. 2025. illus. Second Story. Gr. 8–12.

This title examines propaganda posters created by the Nazi regime to show how this disinformation campaign generated fear and hatred of Jewish people and paved the way to genocide.

Every Falling Star: The True Story of How I Survived and Escaped North Korea. By Sungju Lee and Susan McClelland. 2016. Abrams/Amulet. Gr. 9–12.

With the help of journalist McClelland, Lee recalls his hardscrabble years on the streets of North Korea and offers a firsthand account of the horrendous conditions facing the country's citizens. Perspectives like Lee's are hard to come by, and his experiences in the propaganda-fueled regime and eventual escape are riveting.

Genocide and Propaganda: A Primary Source Collection. By Paul R. Bartrop. 2025. Bloomsbury Academic.

Holocaust and genocide historian Bartrop has assembled case studies and primary-source examples of propaganda campaigns used to justify genocidal violence. The book's broad scope pinpoints many such instances, placing events within historical context followed by representative propaganda documents. Though published for adults, this title is recommended for high-school classrooms and libraries.

Trending: How and Why Stuff Gets Popular. By Kira Vermond. Illus. by Clayton Hanmer. 2020. Owlkids. Gr. 3–6.

Making the point that fads and trends can have good effects or detrimental ones, Vermond offers many examples as she discusses why fads and trends matter, what psychological factors drive people to adopt them, and how readers can resist the potentially dangerous ones, such as trends based on misinformation. The discussion also includes coverage of malicious propaganda in Nazi Germany. An intriguing read that provides insightful commentary and useful intellectual tools for evaluating new fads and ideas as they come along.

White Lies: How the South Lost the Civil War, Then Rewrote the History. By Ann Bausum. 2025. illus. Roaring Brook. Gr. 8–12.

In this enlightening study, Bausum combines facts and explanations with true stories to help dismantle misinformation surrounding slavery and racism in the U.S., and an entire section is devoted to the rise of "Lost Cause" propaganda (the denial of slavery as the cause of the Civil War and the promotion of racism) disguised as history through monuments, Hollywood films, books, and even public-school education.

Fiction

The Assassination of Brangwain Spurge. By M. T. Anderson and Eugene Yelchin. Illus. by Eugene Yelchin. 2018. Candlewick. Gr. 5–8.

In a bitingly funny fantasy about a diplomatic ploy used by warring elf and goblin kingdoms, Anderson and Yelchin cleverly depict the dangerous effects of othering and limiting one's perspective to a single narrative. While not directly dealing with propaganda, it does illuminate how one's perspective can be manipulated and shaped by outside forces.

Berliners. By Vesper Stamper. Illus. by the author. 2022. Knopf. Gr. 8–12.

It's 1961, and twins Peter and Rudi are living on opposite sides of a divided Germany. Stamper's depiction of East Germany during the rise of the Berlin Wall is grim and gritty, but her portrayal of propaganda and how teens can easily fall prey to this kind of rhetoric is spot on, as is her characterization of the consequences suffered by those who would speak against the regime. With black-and-white line drawings by Stamper, this offers a chilling look at authoritarianism and the destruction it wreaks on one family.

Facing the Enemy: How a Nazi Youth Camp in America Tested a Friendship. By Barbara Krasner. 2023. Astra/Calkins Creek. Gr. 7–10.

Drawing upon the existence of an actual Nazi youth camp in the U.S., Krasner's historical novel in verse follows fictional co-protagonists Benjy (Jewish American) and Tommy (German American), whose close friendship is fractured after Tommy is sent to camp and returns altered by Nazi propaganda.

Foul Lady Fortune. By Chloe Gong. 2022. Simon & Schuster/Margaret K. McElderry. Gr. 9–12.

In 1931 Shanghai, Nationalists and Communists are engaged in civil war and a Japanese invasion looms. When the Nationalists connect the murders to Japanese-owned Seagreen Press, publisher of imperialist propaganda, a spy and an assassin pose as newlyweds to infiltrate the press. Gong excels at creating a tense, paranoid atmosphere filled with false identities, uneasy alliances, and surprise betrayals in this action-packed tale of political intrigue.

Max in the Land of Lies: A Tale of World War II. By Adam Gidwitz. 2025. Dutton. Gr. 4–7.

Introduced in *Max in the House of Spies* (2024), Max returns to Berlin with two missions: infiltrate the Funkhaus, the Nazi center of radio propaganda, and find his missing parents. As Max enmeshes himself in the Funkhaus, he struggles to make sense of the machinations of Nazi propaganda and the ongoing assault of lies driving the war forward. Gidwitz delivers what is at once an engrossing spy-thriller and an appropriately devastating story of a boy coming of age in an impossibly brutal world.

Moonstorm. By Yoon Ha Lee. 2024. Delacorte. Gr. 7–10.

Lee, known for infusing the vast world of sf with Korean-inspired adventure, offers a new trilogy opener, which sees Hwa Young training to become an elite space pilot for the same Empire that destroyed her home. Lee incorporates a subtle exploration of media and news censorship, propaganda, and settler colonialism, all while Hwa Young is in the midst of discovering what she truly wants and believes in.

Sunrise on the Reaping. By Suzanne Collins. 2025. Scholastic. Gr. 8–12.

This addition to the Hunger Games world focuses on Haymitch Abernathy's participation in the games during his youth. Collins is unafraid to pose a scathing commentary on the active efforts of a propaganda machine, showing in real time how narratives are reworked to serve the Capitol's agenda, help President Snow maintain his sickly grip on the Districts, and keep the Hunger Games alive.

Art from *Trending.*

Art from *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*.

Essentials

Historical Fiction Beyond World Wars

by Christine Hartman Derr

When thinking of historical fiction, the World War eras often come to mind first, due to a plethora of books that have garnered awards, recognition, and a devoted reader base—all well deserved. Yet other time periods have titles that shine, too. From alternate history to time travel to immersing readers in the past, these titles represent various times, perspectives, and locations throughout history for middle-grade and YA readers.

Young Adult

A Sisterhood of Secret Ambitions. By Sheena Boekweg. 2021. Feiwel and Friends. Gr. 8–11.

Prohibition, Jim Crow, and gender norms still dominate the societal landscape in this alternate history novel. However, a group of women known as The First Ladies' Society works behind closed doors to guide the country towards change by influencing powerful men. Inclusive, incisive, and invites curiosity about the time period.

Dreamland Burning. By Jennifer Latham. 2017. Little, Brown. Gr. 8–11.

This dual–time line historical fiction weaves a contemporary narrative with one set during the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. After a skeleton is found in her family's shed, Rowan becomes determined to find out who this person was. In 1921, Will faces escalating violence and impossible decisions as tragedy draws closer. Latham offers an unflinching look at racism, segregation, and a city haunted by a past it struggles to acknowledge.

Into the Bright Open: A Secret Garden Remix. By Cherie Dimaline. 2023. Feiwel and Friends. Gr. 8–10.

Recently orphaned Mary Lennox journeys from Toronto to the Georgian Bay, where the wilderness, newfound family, and young love offer a healing path for her. Shifts in understanding of herself and others propel Mary through an emotional journey amid plenty of growth and resilience.

Last Night at the Telegraph Club. By Malindo Lo. 2021. Dutton. Gr. 9–12.

In 1950s San Francisco, high-school student Lily Hu dreams of a career at the Jet Propulsion Lab instead of finding a husband, and she finds a kindred spirit in Kath, whose goal is to be a pilot. As the two young girls spend time together, including at a local queer bar called the Telegraph Club, their relationship grows and changes in ways that have a ripple effect on their lives.

Sheine Lende: A Prequel to Elatsoe. By Darcie Little Badger. Illus. by Rovina Cai. 2024. Levine Querido. Gr. 9–12.

Set in the same alternate world as *Elatsoe*, this prequel follows Elatsoe's grandmother in the 1970s. In a world populated with mythical creatures of all kinds, one Lipan Apache teen works to find her missing mother, who disappeared while on a search-and-rescue mission for a pair of siblings. Realistic details of the 1970s accompany fantastical elements to build a believable, intriguing world.

The Downstairs Girl. By Stacey Lee. 2019. Putnam. Gr. 9–12.

This witty, voice-y novel follows a Chinese American teenager with a snarky advice column in Reconstruction-

era Atlanta. Jo secretly lives below the print shop of a local newspaper, and when she overhears that the newspaper needs more subscribers or it could fold, she anonymously writes an advice column that gets the town talking. Intersectional representation, stunning historical details, and gorgeous writing make this novel impossible to put down.

Throwback. By Maurene Goo. 2023. Zando. Gr. 9–12.

After an epic fight with her mom, Sam is sent back to 1995, where she meets her mom as a teen. Sam begins to understand the overt sexism and racism her mom endured as a first-generation Korean American. Time-travel obstacles, a sparkling '90s setting, and laugh-out-loud high jinks make this one memorable read.

Middle Grade

Indian No More. By Charlene Willing McManis and Traci Sorell. 2019. Lee & Low/Tu. Gr. 3–6.

In 1954, Regina's tribe is terminated by the federal government, culminating in her family taking the government's relocation offer. Living in Los Angeles is quite different from life on their reservation, and now Regina must grapple with who she is in this new landscape and what it means to be Native American in L.A. This seldom told period of Native history is shown through the experience of one young girl.

Mary and the Trail of Tears: A Cherokee Removal Survival Story. By Andrea L. Rogers. Illus. by Matt Forsyth. 2020. Capstone/Stone Arch. Gr. 4–7.

Rogers offers an unflinching look at how the Trail of Tears affects one Cherokee family. Mary and her family are living on Cherokee land in Georgia when armed soldiers arrive and force them out, following the orders of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Strong characterization and vivid details bring light to an under-discussed era.

Ophie's Ghosts. By Justina Ireland. 2021. HarperCollins/Balzer+Bray. Gr. 4–8.

In 1923, Jim Crow laws preside, even in Pittsburgh, where Ophelia and her mother have moved from Georgia to seek safety in the wake of racist violence. Working for a wealthy white family, Ophie, who can see ghosts, encounters many more specters in the white family's house, and in an effort to help the ghosts move on, she works to solve the mystery of one ghost's death. Starkly accurate historical details add to the setting and atmosphere. Ireland expertly shows the layers of prejudice and racism, both subtle and overt. An intriguing setting and especially spectacular protagonist make this mystery unputdownable.

The First State of Being. By Erin Entrada Kelly. 2024. Greenwillow. Gr. 5–7.

Michael may only be 12, but his worries far outnumber his age. To prep for Y2K, he begins not-so-legally stockpiling food while trying to look out for those he cares about. When a time-traveling boy from the future appears, Michael sees a new way to ease his worries with a shortcut to certainty. However, the dangers 1999 poses to their neighborhood time traveler are encroaching.

The Places We Sleep. By Caroline Brooks DuBois. 2020. Holiday. Gr. 4–7.

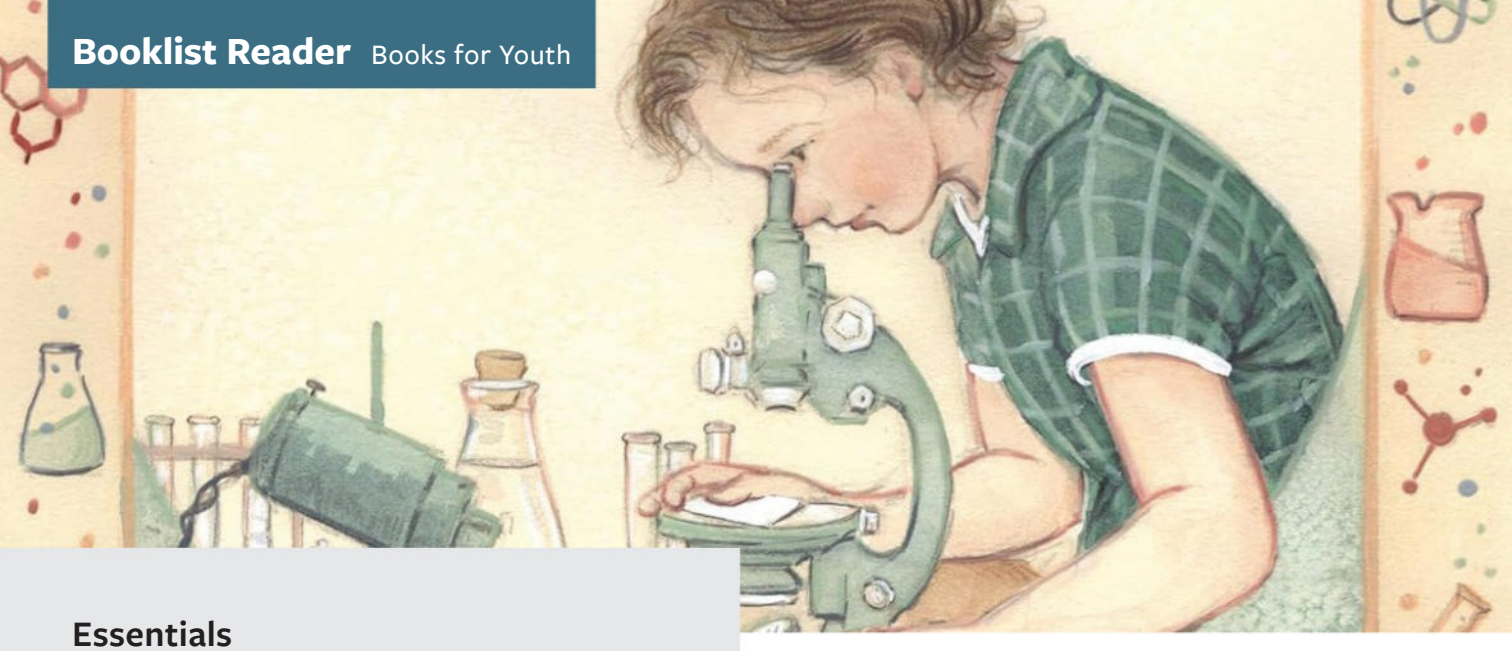
Abbey's seventh-grade year begins in 2001 as she is *again* the new kid. Her dad's role in the Army has made her accustomed to moving and finding new friends. But the September 11 attacks change everything, fast: her aunt is missing, her mom is grieving, her dad is called to active duty.

Unsinkable Cayenne. By Jessica Vitalis. 2024. Greenwillow. Gr. 4–7.

It's 1985, and seventh-grader Cayenne is thrilled her family is giving up its nomadic lifestyle to put down roots. Her life begins to mirror her school studies of class differences on the *Titanic* as the line between the haves and have-nots is entrenched more deeply by sawmill layoffs.

We Dream of Space. By Erin Entrada Kelly. 2020. Greenwillow. Gr. 4–7.

The alternating perspectives of siblings Fitch, Bird, and Cash root readers firmly in 1986 as they each cope with their tumultuous home life and individual issues: Bird anticipates the *Challenger* shuttle launch while dreaming of working for NASA, Fitch deals with drama at the arcade, and Cash fears failing seventh grade—again. Peppered with historical details, realistic relationships, and dynamic characters who shine.



Essentials

Recent Picture Book Biographies of Scientists

by Sarah Hunter

The past few years have brought a treasure trove of picture-book biographies of scientists both famous and lesser known, across an array of fields. Kids curious about the world and the universe beyond will find plenty of inspiration in these information-packed pages.

Alberto Salas Plays Paka Paka con la Papa: Join the Quest with Peru's Famed Scientist and Potato Expert. By Sara Andrea Fajardo. Illus. by Juana Martinez-Neal. 2025. Roaring Brook. K–Gr. 3.

Soft, playful artwork helps introduce Alberto Salas, who scours the Andes Mountains for new potato species to bring to Peru's International Potato Center genebank. Also available in Spanish.

The Brilliant Calculator: How Mathematician Edith Clarke Helped Electrify America. By Jan Lower. Illus. by Susan Reagan. 2023. Astra/Calkins Creek. Gr. 2–5.

Late nineteenth-century "human calculator" Edith Clarke defied convention, first by inventing a calculating tool and then by becoming America's first woman electrical engineer.

The Fire of Stars: The Life and Brilliance of the Woman Who Discovered What Stars Are Made Of. By Kirsten W. Larson. Illus. by Katherine Roy. 2023. Chronicle. K–Gr. 3.

Parallel narratives relate the birth of a star and the life of Cecilia Payne, a pioneering astrophysicist who discovered the composition of stars in this artful, kid-friendly biography.

Firefly Song: Lynn Frierson Faust and the Great Smoky Mountain Discovery. By Colleen Paeff. Illus. by Ji-Hyuk Kim. 2025. Simon & Schuster/Margaret K. McElderry. K–Gr. 3.

Self-taught naturalist Lynn Frierson Faust's study of synchronous fireflies in the Great Smoky Mountains shines bright in this illuminating picture-book biography with gorgeous art.

The Five Sides of Marjorie Rice: How to Discover a Shape. By Amy Alznauer. Illus. by Anna Bron. 2025. Candlewick. Gr. 2–5.

This lively picture-book biography introduces a notable amateur mathematician who discovered several previously unknown five-sided tessellating polygons.

Friend of Numbers: The Life of Mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan. By Priya Narayanan. Illus. by Satwik Gade. 2023. Eerdmans. K–Gr. 3.

Ramanujan's mathematical discoveries might seem obscure, but this extensive biography nicely explains how influential his work has been to many scientific fields.

Galaxy Mapper: The Luminous Discoveries of Astrophysicist Hélène Courtois. By Allie Summers. Illus. by Sian James. 2025. Candlewick/MIT Kids. Gr. 1–4.

Appropriately starry skies fill the illustrations of this book about a contemporary cosmographer who continues to map distant galaxies and star fields.

The High-Flying, Deep-Diving Adventures of Kathy Sullivan: Astronaut and Oceanographer. By Diane Stanley. Illus. by Jessie Hartland. 2025. Simon & Schuster/Beach Lane. Gr. 1–4.

Emphasizing that her impressive career achievements

began with childhood curiosity, this conversational biography introduces the first American woman to walk in space and the first woman to reach the deepest-known point in the ocean.

Magic in a Drop of Water: How Ruth Patrick Taught the World about Water Pollution. By Julie Winterbottom. Illus. by Susan Reagan. 2025. Penguin/Rocky Pond. Gr. 1–3.

This relatable story of a little girl who "fell in love with pond scum" serves as an accessible introduction to the wonders found in a drop of water in Winterbottom's beautifully illustrated science biography.

Queen of Leaves: The Story of Botanist Ynes Mexia. By Stephen Briseño. Illus. by Isabel Muñoz. 2023. Innovation. Gr. 1–3.

Warm artwork and inspiring text introduce Ynes Mexia, who came to science late in life, but once she did, she threw herself into adventure, facing dangerous conditions to collect plant specimens all over the world.

Remembering Rosalind Franklin: Rosalind Franklin & the Discovery of the Double Helix Structure of DNA. By Tanya Lee Stone. Illus. by Gretchen Ellen Powers. 2024. Little, Brown/Christy Ottaviano. Gr. 2–5.

Pleasingly nostalgic in feel, this illuminating picture-book biography shares the life and important scientific contributions of molecular biologist Rosalind Franklin.

Rock Star: How Ursula Marvin Mapped Rocks and Meteorites. By Sandra Neil Wallace. Illus. by Nancy Carpenter. 2025. Simon & Schuster/Paula Wiseman. Gr. 1–3.

Wallace enthusiastically celebrates planetary geologist Marvin, who brushed past overt gender barriers to become such an authority in her field that an Antarctic ridge, an asteroid, and a lunar crater are named after her.

Rooting for Plants: The Unstoppable Charles S. Parker, Black Botanist and Collector. By Janice N. Harrington. Illus. by Theodore Taylor III. 2023. Astra/Calkins Creek. Gr. 2–5.

Elevating a Black scientist out of obscurity, Harrington and Taylor profile this passionate botanist and mycologist who, after serving in WWI, became an authority on plants and fungi.

Through the Telescope: Mae Jemison Dreams of Space. By Charles R. Smith Jr. Illus. by Evening Monteiro. 2025. Scholastic/Orchard. PreS–Gr. 2.

In this imaginative and inspiring book about Mae Jemison, Smith and Monteiro emphasize how her childhood fascination with the cosmos fueled the path toward her groundbreaking career.

Wanda Hears the Stars: A Blind Astronomer Listens to the Universe. By Amy S. Hansen and Wanda Díaz Merced. Illus. by Rocío Arreola Mendoza. 2025. Charlesbridge. Gr. 1–4.

This engagingly illustrated picture-book biography traces the struggle and triumph of an aspiring astronomer who didn't let blindness stop her from finding a way to observe the stars.

When Science Stood Still: How S. Chandrasekhar Predicted the Existence of Black Holes. By Shruthi Rao. Illus. by Srinidhi Srinivasan. 2025. Simon & Schuster/Margaret K. McElderry. Gr. 1–3.

Though Chandrasekhar's groundbreaking scientific ideas were initially dismissed by his English peers, that didn't stop the brilliant astrophysicist from continuing his work, which eventually won him a Nobel prize.

Art from *The Fire of Stars*.

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